

The Origins of the Thirty Years War and the Revolt in Bohemia, 1618

Geoff Mortimer



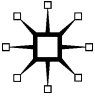
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First published 2015 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-57689-0 ISBN 978-1-137-54385-1 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137543851

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

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Acknowledgements

The author would particularly like to thank Dr Alena Pazderová of the Czech National Archive, and Sona Cernocka of the Lobkowicz Library and Archives, for their help in locating the original documents concerning the trials of the leading Bohemian rebels which are referred to in Chapter 7. Thanks also go to Professor Ceri Davies, Emeritus Professor of Classics at Swansea University, for his assistance in translating the Latin text.

Conventions

Dates given in this book are ‘new style’ according to the Gregorian calendar.

Germanic name forms are used throughout for Germanic people. Where recognised Germanic forms for Czech names exist these are also used. Standard anglicisations are employed where relevant for the names of other people.

The German aristocratic titles of *Markgraf* (margrave), *Landgraf* (landgrave), and *Pfalzgraf* (palgrave) were higher than simply *Graf* (count), and as they were almost equivalent to duke this is sometimes used for convenience, particularly collectively. All ranks above count were also entitled to be called *Fürst* (prince).

‘Estates’ can refer either to assemblies, or to the individuals, classes of individuals, or corporate bodies (i.e. cities) entitled to sit in or to be represented in them. To limit the potential confusion a capital ‘E’ is used for the former and lower case for the latter.

All translations are the author’s own.

Notes and References

There are no notes, but source references are given throughout the text in the form of author names and page numbers. Details are given in the bibliography, where works by the same author are distinguished by the abbreviations shown.





1

The Origins of the Thirty Years War?

The Thirty Years War was not only long, but also extremely complicated. Hence almost all modern histories of the war (with one recent exception¹) have sought to confine their accounts of the circumstances and events prior to the revolt in Bohemia to their first substantive chapter. Although there are differences in detail the overall approach is generally similar, outlining the increasing tensions and the specific incidents which by 1618 had created a critical situation in which a rebellion in Prague could lead to a prolonged and widespread conflict. English-speaking historians tend to stress the international context rather more than their German colleagues, even those who espouse the modern European view of the war, but this is a matter of emphasis rather than a difference of principle. Consequently this book too will set out a summary of the background to the war as Chapter 1, firstly in order to present the relevant facts conveniently and concisely, but secondly as the basis for a discussion in Chapter 2 of the validity of the standard interpretation.

Arndt describes the Thirty Years War as 'a European war, but one which took place predominantly on the soil of the Holy Roman Empire'.² The latter part of this observation is certainly true in a literal sense, as at that time the Empire still theoretically included not only Germany, Austria and the lands of the Bohemian crown, but also much of northern Italy, together with Franche-Comté, Alsace, Lorraine and the Spanish Netherlands, as well as the United Provinces (Dutch Republic) and indeed the Swiss Cantons, notwithstanding that both the latter territories had long since established their practical independence. Nevertheless the term 'Empire' was by then commonly used in a more limited sense, excluding not only the Swiss and the Dutch, but also the areas under Spanish and French control or influence, while the status of

the lands of the Bohemian crown had long been decidedly ambiguous. Thus defined, the Empire comprised principally Germany and Austria, and indeed contemporaries, including many in Austria itself, often used 'Empire' loosely to mean simply Germany, as distinct from the Habsburg lands. This is relevant because much of the discussion of the background to the Thirty Years War concerns events in the Empire in this narrower but more meaningful sense.

The term 'Thirty Years War' is itself still not absolutely clear. Steinberg's thesis that the war is a construct invented by historians has long since been discredited, but accounts are nevertheless not always precise about the extent to which conflicts outside the core of the Empire were part of the war, or were only peripheral events which impinged upon it from time to time.³ Gustavus Adolphus contended in 1628 that all the wars taking place in Europe, from La Rochelle in south-western France to his own involvement in Poland, had become parts of a single whole, but this was even then an extreme view, while in the years around 1618 any such unity is much harder to perceive.⁴ Shortly before the Bohemian revolt the later Emperor Ferdinand II, then archduke of Styria, was fighting Venice in the Uzkok war, while the duke of Savoy was fighting the Spanish in northern Italy in the second stage of the Mantuan War of Succession, and Gustavus Adolphus was already fighting the Poles in Livonia. Between 1619 and 1621, during the war in Bohemia, there was civil war in France, Poland was skirmishing with the Turks and with Bethlen Gabor, prince of Transylvania, who was himself fighting the emperor, and the Spanish were occupying the Valtelline in the Swiss canton of Graubünden. Particularly problematic in this context is the status of the war between Spain and the United Provinces, which commenced in 1568 after the initial revolt in the Spanish Netherlands two years earlier, but which was in abeyance, at least on land in Europe, during a truce from 1609 to 1621. The years leading up to the outbreak of the Thirty Years War were thus also the years leading up to the widely expected resumption of war in the Netherlands, but whether these were separate issues or different facets of the same one posed interpretational problems for contemporaries and subsequent historians alike.

The international situation

The rivalry between France and Spain was the most important single aspect of international relations in Europe throughout most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This rivalry had its own history, but

even longer established and more intense had been the rivalry between the French monarchy and the dukes of Burgundy. The two issues became entwined, together with the Habsburg connection, through a series of inheritances, some sought-after and others accidental, in the latter years of the fifteenth and early years of the sixteenth centuries. In 1477 Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy died at Nancy in the last battle of the Burgundian Wars with France, following which the French seized Burgundy itself, but his Netherlands possessions, principally modern Belgium and Holland, passed to his only surviving child, the 19-year-old Mary. She promptly married the Habsburg Archduke Maximilian of Austria, the later Emperor Maximilian I, and after her own early death in a riding accident their son, known as Philip the Handsome, inherited the Netherlands, becoming ruler when he reached the age of 16 in 1494. Two years later Philip married a Spanish princess, Joanna of Castile, a good but not spectacular marriage, as she was only the third child of Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, but following two unexpected deaths and much political in-fighting she inherited Castile in 1506 and Aragon in 1516. By then Philip was already dead, having predeceased his father the emperor, and as Joanna was deemed to be mad their 16-year-old son became co-ruler and regent, as well as inheriting Habsburg Austria and being elected emperor as Charles V soon afterwards, in 1519.

Thus instead of rival but separate powers on its borders France was suddenly faced with Habsburg Spain to the south, the Habsburg Netherlands to the north, and the Habsburg-led Empire to the east, all under a single powerful and able ruler. The resulting perception of Habsburg encirclement became the enduring central feature of French foreign policy, and it was particularly significant both in the approach to and in the course of the Thirty Years War. France had already crossed swords with Spain under Ferdinand II of Aragon in the first phase of the Italian wars, which commenced in 1494. These were a complicated series of conflicts extending over more than sixty years and involving many minor principalities and various outsiders, but in which rivalry for influence between France and Spain played a significant part. In the latter respect Spain under Charles V was the clear winner, securing the major territories of Naples and Milan, and emerging at the high point of its power.

Charles proved to be the first and last head of the vast combined inheritances of Habsburg Austria, the Burgundian Netherlands and the crowns of Castile and Aragon, as when he retired in 1556 he passed the Habsburg inheritance, and with it the family candidacy for the Imperial

crown, to his younger brother Ferdinand. Thus his son Philip II inherited only the Spanish, Italian and Netherlands possessions, which he ruled for 42 years until his death in 1598, when he was succeeded by his 20-year-old son Philip III. By the early years of the seventeenth century this separation of the Spanish and Austrian branches of the family and their respective territories was long established, but they nevertheless all remained Habsburgs, a fact reinforced by repeated intermarriage. This gave rise to an ambiguity in respect of the Empire, in that Spain was in one sense an outsider, a foreign power, but in another sense an insider and part of the establishment, not only having substantial lands in modern France and Italy which were nominally within the Empire, but also being so closely bound to the Austrian and Imperial ruling family that many contemporaries, particularly opponents, tended to see them as one and the same thing.

France came clearly into this latter category, but in contrast to Spain the country was split internally by political and religious rivalries, aggravated by the accidental death of the king in a tournament in 1559, followed by the death of his 15-year-old son and successor a year later. The old king's widow became regent on behalf of her second son, but growing confessional tensions quickly developed into the wars of religion which racked France for the rest of the century, although aristocratic feuding played an equally significant part. Both sides had their extremists, Calvinists and ultra-Catholics respectively, and among the many executions, assassinations and atrocities the most notorious event was the St Bartholomew's Day massacre of Huguenots (Protestants) in 1572. Spain provided assistance to the Catholic party, but in 1589 the Catholic King Henri III was assassinated by a Catholic monk, a deed which had the perverse effect of entitling a Calvinist, King Henri of Navarre, to the French succession. The latter was already in the field leading Protestant forces holding the south and west of the country, and his army went on to win important battles, but also to lay siege unsuccessfully to Paris and Rouen, rebuffs to which the participation of Spanish troops contributed significantly. Eventually Henri converted to Catholicism, allegedly commenting that Paris was well worth a Mass, and he was crowned as Henri IV in 1594. Not everyone was convinced by his conversion, however, and ultra-Catholic resistance continued with Spanish support, leading to open war with Spain from 1595 to 1598. Peace in the latter year was accompanied by an internal settlement, Henri IV's Edict of Nantes, a decree which made concessions to the Protestants although not satisfying extremists on either side. The tensions remained, and they increased after Henri's assassination

in 1610, so that a Huguenot rebellion broke out in 1620 and troubles continued up to Richelieu's siege of Huguenot La Rochelle in 1627 and 1628.

Although the rivalry between France and Spain continued throughout, it nevertheless receded into the background for much of the time during which France was wrestling with its internal problems, while Spain's energies and resources were taken up by the war with the Dutch. Hence this latter long-running struggle became a central feature of the international situation during the crucial years leading up to the Thirty Years War. By the beginning of the seventeenth century Spain was still a great power, indeed the greatest power in Europe, but past its peak and facing the classic problem of having too many commitments but insufficient resources. This was most apparent in Philip II's inability to suppress the revolt in the Netherlands quickly, or at all, and in the spectacular failure of his armada sent against England in 1588, but equally symptomatic were the four state bankruptcies in the fifty years from 1557 to 1607. The twelve-year truce agreed in 1609 was a reflection of Spanish weakness, as the terms were decidedly unfavourable, allowing the Dutch to go on harassing Spain's overseas colonies and trade, and to keep the Scheldt estuary closed, thereby maintaining the blockade of Antwerp, the most important commercial centre in the Spanish Netherlands. The Dutch had used their *de facto* independence to good effect in the fields of trade and industry, which together with French subsidies was how they were able to finance the continuing war, but a considerable part of their progress had been at the expense of outmoded and inefficient Spanish competition. The revolt had initially centred around religion, but in the intervening years political and especially economic issues had become increasingly significant, to the extent that by the time the question of renewing or ending the truce came to be considered religious questions were, as Asch notes, 'ultimately of secondary importance'.⁵ The truce had shown the Spanish that even if they could barely afford to fight the Dutch they could certainly not afford to allow them the commercial freedom which would accompany peace.

The tensions between Spain and France also had a bearing on the war in the Netherlands, aggravating the former's problems with the so-called Spanish road. To sustain their war effort the Spanish needed to send men, military supplies and money to the Netherlands, but because the Dutch had clear superiority at sea this had to be done mainly over land. The shortest route, directly across France, was out of the question, so the delivery columns had to start from the Spanish possessions in northern Italy, which meant crossing the Alps, making the process slow, arduous

and expensive. The main Swiss passes were barred to the Spanish by the determinedly neutral cantons of the confederation, so the original road ran west from Milan, through the duchy of Savoy and into the Spanish-held Franche Comté, then via the duchy of Lorraine into Luxembourg and the Spanish Netherlands. This route had been established and first used following the original rebellion in the 1560s, but it ran uncomfortably close to French borders and territories, as well as being vulnerable to the changeable policies of the independent duchies through which it passed. By the early 1600s the ambitious, assertive and generally anti-Habsburg Charles Emmanuel I of Savoy posed a particular problem in this respect, so that an alternative had to be found. This led north from Milan to the head of Lake Como, and then east through the Valtelline and over the Stelvio pass into the Habsburg territory of Tyrol, before turning west through southern Germany to the Rhine. The Valtelline is now in northern Italy, but it was then in the territory of Graubünden, a Protestant-controlled independent canton, although the population of the valley itself was both Catholic and rebellious. In 1603 the Spanish fortified their end of the valley, and after disturbances and repression in 1618, followed by a Habsburg-encouraged Catholic uprising in 1620, they occupied it completely, albeit only temporarily, as they were forced by French-led pressure to withdraw in 1623.⁶

Elsewhere in Europe there were also conflicts in which religion and politics were intermingled. In England in 1605 Catholic plotters attempted to blow up the Protestant King James I, together with his parliament, despite which, and regardless of anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic opposition at home, James later sought unsuccessfully for almost a decade to marry his son and heir to a Spanish infanta, although by then he had already married his daughter to the Calvinist elector of the Palatinate.

The circumstances leading up to Sweden's major involvement in the Thirty Years War date back to 1587, when the Catholic Sigismund inherited the crown of the predominantly Lutheran country and in the same year was elected to the throne of his mother's native Poland. In 1600 he was deposed in Sweden by his Protestant uncle, who became Charles IX, although Roberts comments that in the early years of the Counter-Reformation 'it was not difficult for Charles to beat the Protestant drum and represent what was really a struggle for power as essentially a religious issue'.⁷ Charles promptly invaded Livonia, a territory recently secured by Poland against Russian claims, and adjacent to Estonia, which had been extracted from Russia by Sweden at around the same time. The subsequent long-running although intermittent war between

Sweden and Poland thus had both a territorial and a dynastic basis, as Sigismund did not give up his claims to the Swedish crown, and Russia was also involved. To further complicate the situation Charles managed to provoke Denmark, under its new young King Christian IV, who declared war in 1611, but Charles died soon afterwards, leaving the problems to his young son, the barely seventeen-year-old Gustavus II Adolphus. The war was lost, and the price of peace was a huge indemnity to be paid to Denmark, which was raised through heavy taxation and borrowing until the last instalment was paid in 1619, leaving Gustavus free to turn once again to Poland and to war in Livonia.

Europe, and the Habsburg lands in particular, had long been under pressure from the Turks in the south east. During the hundred years from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries the Ottoman Empire expanded in several directions, particularly round the Mediterranean, but also into the Balkans and beyond.⁸ In one respect the Habsburgs were beneficiaries, as Ferdinand, Charles V's younger brother and later his successor as emperor, managed to gain election to the crown of the Bohemian lands when the last Jagiellon king fell at the battle of Mohács in 1526, during Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent's advance into Hungary. The crown of Hungary was also elective, but in the aftermath of the defeat two contenders both secured a form of election. One of these was Ferdinand, who was only able to take possession of a strip of the northern and western parts of the country, while his rival sought Ottoman protection and controlled much of the rest. In the wars which followed Suleyman dramatically but unsuccessfully besieged Vienna itself in 1529, as well as invading Austria a second time in 1532, while in 1541 Ferdinand made his own incursion into the Ottoman part of Hungary. This was a failure, as a result of which the Habsburgs had to accept a truce on humiliating terms, including payment of an annual tribute to the sultan for their part of Hungary. In 1568, two years after Suleyman's death, a more permanent treaty was agreed, although the tribute continued, as did the split of Hungary into three parts, one Habsburg, one Ottoman, and the third the principality of Transylvania, a nominally independent but tributary buffer state supported by the Ottomans to keep the Habsburgs away from their own borders. Although relative peace then lasted for 25 years until the Long Turkish War of 1593 to 1606 there were numerous incidents, and the need to maintain defences against the Turks was a constant drain on Austrian finances. The wider ramifications of what Murphey calls 'the complex matrix of intersecting spheres of Ottoman and Habsburg influence' is well illustrated by the unlikely sounding alliance between

Catholic France and the Muslim Ottoman Empire, which was agreed under Suleyman in 1536 and lasted in substance until the French Revolution.⁹ Even the distant Netherlands felt the effect, as hostilities between Spain and the Turks in the Mediterranean deprived Philip II of the naval and other resources he needed to be able to suppress the Dutch revolt quickly in the 1560s.

Imperial institutions

Before discussing events in the Empire it is necessary to outline certain aspects of its structure and institutions which have a significant bearing on them. Two important measures formalised the framework and led the move out of the Middle Ages, the Golden Bull of 1356, which established the seven electors for the offices of king of Rome (effectively emperor designate) and emperor, and the *Ewiger Landfriede* (Permanent Peace) of 1495, which abolished the practice of feuding and placed the threat of the Imperial ban (outlawing) over anyone who resorted to arms in furtherance of a dispute within the Empire. During the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth centuries a process of reform established the principal institutions of the Empire and the procedures of the Reichstag (Imperial Diet), the highest assembly and law-making body, resulting in a significant shift in the balance of power away from the emperor in favour of the estates in respect of taxation, lawmaking and the administration of justice. During this period the estates also gained a practical role in the administration of the Empire, as the lack of an effective executive had been a major weakness in the past. Thus in the early sixteenth century the ten Imperial circles were created, those for Bavaria and Austria effectively dominated by a single member each, whereas at the other extreme the Swabian Circle had over a hundred members, while the lands of the Bohemian crown and Imperial Italy were not included in the system at all.

The circles provided at least some help in organising the large number of constituents of the Empire, which may have approached or even exceeded 1800 at times as territories split or merged due to inheritances and marriages. In principle these included all entities whose ruler or ruling body owed fealty directly to the emperor, and these ranged from a few substantial principalities such as Bavaria, Brandenburg and Saxony, down to a large number of Imperial knights whose possessions might have amounted to little more than a village and its fields. Alongside them were the free Imperial cities and a wide range of ecclesiastical institutions, from bishoprics with vast lands to modest abbeys, monasteries

and convents. Accidents of history rather than logic often determined membership, so that size was no guide, and many big cities and ecclesiastical foundations were not included as they had an intermediate overlord between them and the emperor. There were many other odd situations. The archbishop-elect of Cologne, for example, had a large territory in the Rhineland, but it did not include the free Imperial city of Cologne, even though his cathedral was in its centre. A smaller number, but still some hundreds of the constituents of the Empire, had the right to make treaties and alliances among themselves or with foreign powers, restricted only by the formula that such alliances must not be directed against the emperor or the Empire. However only those with *Sitz und Stimme* (a seat and a vote) were entitled to participate in meetings of the Reichstag. These, the *Reichsstände* (estates of the Empire), comprised six of the electors, of the order of two hundred ecclesiastical and secular princes (although some had shared rather than individual votes), and the representatives of around eighty free Imperial cities, a membership which often made consensus difficult to achieve. Procedure too was cumbersome, as three colleges, respectively the electors, princes and cities, deliberated separately on propositions put forward by the emperor, then conferred together, and eventually submitted a joint response. Only when this was approved by the emperor and incorporated in the closing resolution of the Reichstag meeting did it become law.

The ambiguous situation of Bohemia was referred to above. While its king was one of the seven electors, this entitled him to vote only in the elections of the king of Rome and the emperor, not to participate in the other deliberations of the electoral college in the Reichstag. Nor was Bohemia included in the circle system, or in the administration of justice by the highest court of the Empire. By the mid-sixteenth century the situation had become even stranger, as while the three ecclesiastical electors, the archbishops of Cologne, Mainz and Trier, were all Catholic, three of the secular ones, the dukes of Brandenburg, the Palatinate and Saxony, had become Protestants, so that the king of Bohemia held the casting vote as regards confession, and was thus crucial for ensuring the election of a Catholic emperor, as well as for keeping the Imperial crown in the Habsburg family.

The law courts constituted the other important institution of the Empire, as while territories had their own internal legal systems only the Imperial courts could adjudicate on cases involving disputes between persons or entities owing fealty directly to the emperor. This, together with dealing with breaches of the Imperial law and the Imperial peace,

as well as fiscal matters, was the function of the *Reichskammergericht* (the Imperial Chamber Court, hereafter abbreviated to 'Kammergericht'), at this time based in Speyer. By the beginning of the sixteenth century the emperor's influence on this court was limited to nominating a minority of the members, six judges plus the president, while the electoral college and the college of princes each nominated a further six. Notable both here and in the Reichstag was the disproportionate weight accorded to the electors, both in comparison to other princes and to the cities, the latter in particular having little more than an advisory role even though they paid a substantial proportion of the Imperial taxes. The judgements of the Kammergericht were subject to review, effectively an appeals mechanism, by a committee known as the Visitation Commission, which met annually and whose members were nominated in rotation by individual entitled members of the Reichstag. Not surprisingly, the final resolution of cases through this system was notoriously slow.

The administration of justice had always been closely associated with monarchical power, so that in due course emperors responded to their diminished influence on the Kammergericht by seeking an alternative. Thus in the mid-sixteenth century a section of the emperor's privy council also began to function as a court, the *Reichshofrat* (Imperial Court Council or Aulic Council, hereafter abbreviated to 'Hofrat'). Here the emperor had full control, as he nominated and paid the president, vice-president and all the twelve to eighteen other judges, as well as retaining an ultimate right of decision in critical cases. In time this court began to take on cases over the full range for which the Kammergericht was responsible, thus effectively duplicating it. The cumbersome and imprecise constitution of the Empire provided little scope for the latter court or the Reichstag to challenge this development, even had they wished to do so, so that in practice it was simply accepted and the two courts operated in parallel. The Hofrat thus came to deal with many relatively ordinary cases, but it also provided the emperor with a faster and more biddable means of securing legal backing in more controversial circumstances.

The Empire before 1580

Given the conflicts all around its borders, it may seem surprising that the Empire itself enjoyed some sixty years of substantial peace before the outbreak of the war which then convulsed it for the next thirty. Apart from the recurrent episodes on the Turkish or Transylvanian borders

and Ferdinand of Styria's minor Uzkok war, the major principalities of Germany and Austria had no significant involvement in external wars, and although there were some internal disturbances these did not develop into major or long-lasting hostilities. Religious tensions there certainly were, but the resulting disputes were essentially confined to polemic and the law courts, only occasionally going beyond limited and localised brawling in the streets. Contemporaries tended to be pessimistic, foreseeing a gradually deteriorating situation leading ultimately to a major war, and with the benefit of hindsight historians have often echoed their view, but the more remarkable fact is that the Empire for so long avoided the fate of France and its wars of religion.

In considering the Empire in the years leading up to the Thirty Years War a thematic approach is usually adopted, which is certainly easier and probably clearer than the alternative. The drawback is that this makes it more difficult to appreciate the interrelationship of events and time, and to see how and why tensions increased due to actions and incidents in certain periods but eased in others when less happened. Hence the following review is as nearly chronological as is consistent with clarity in dealing with a complex subject. It also focuses principally on the Empire as Germany, including Austria only as relevant, and viewing the emperor in this context as a separate persona from the ruler of the Habsburg hereditary lands, principally in Austria, together with those of the Bohemian crown and in Hungary. The many important circumstances and events which were more specific to those lands and their ruler will be discussed in greater depth in describing the origins of the revolt in Bohemia.

Religion, starting from the Reformation, is normally taken as central, and while this is valid it also needs to be qualified from the outset. Religion was only one of the factors at work in the European conflicts already outlined, and the same was true within the Empire. Demands for religious freedoms for Protestants were closely linked with aspirations towards political freedoms for the Protestant nobility and gentry pressing them, while Catholic hierarchies commonly saw religious conformity and political obedience as two sides of the same coin. Then too, the Habsburgs were so closely linked with Catholicism that political opposition to Habsburg power often went hand in hand with an anti-Catholic religious stance. At an individual level many leading figures were clearly totally genuine in their beliefs, including significant numbers who conscientiously converted from one confession to another, but it is equally clear that there were others to whom religion was or could be made a matter of convenience. Henri IV may have converted to win

Paris, and with it France, but others converted to secure more modest inheritances, advantageous marriages or even a good job in the government. Princes were often able to make their personal, dynastic and political objectives coincide with their religious affiliations, and Charles IX of Sweden was far from being the only one to 'beat the Protestant (or Catholic) drum' when it suited his aims. Hence it is wise to keep well in mind that religion was rarely the only consideration in overtly religious conflicts and confrontations in the hundred years after the Reformation.

The initial response of the Empire to the Reformation which began in 1517 was to try to suppress it as an aberration, to which end Charles V had Luther and his writings banned at the Reichstag meeting in Worms in 1521. The new faith continued to spread nevertheless, and in an effort to secure acceptance the Lutherans drafted a statement and justification of their beliefs, particularly stressing the points of agreement with the Catholics, which they submitted to the Reichstag meeting in Augsburg in 1530. However this *Confessio Augustana* (Augsburg Confession) was rejected and the earlier ban was reconfirmed. In response several Lutheran states, led by the elector of Saxony, head of the Ernestine branch of the Wettin family, established the Schmalkaldic League for Protestant self-defence in the eponymous town in 1531. This defiant act went unchecked for over a decade while Charles was involved elsewhere, mainly in the Italian wars, but when he returned to Germany in 1544 he started gathering allies, including ducal Saxony, the territory of the rival Albertine branch of the Wettin family. Faced with his obviously warlike preparations the Schmalkaldic leaders decided to strike first in 1546. War in that year was limited and inconclusive, marked mainly by invasion and counter-invasion of each other's territory by the two Saxon dukes, but in the following year Charles won a decisive victory at the battle of Mühlberg. As a punishment he transferred the electoral title from the Ernestines to the Albertine Duke Moritz, and in 1548 he issued a decree known as the Augsburg Interim to prepare for the reintegration of the Protestants into the Catholic church. Resistance took the form of a further revolt by the Protestant princes in 1552, this time led by the selfsame Moritz of Saxony, with French assistance. Their superior forces prevailed, so that Charles was forced to flee, leaving his brother Ferdinand to negotiate with the rebels. The emperor was thus obliged both to cancel the Augsburg Interim and to accept the peace of Passau of 1552, which formed the starting point for the more comprehensive settlement reached three years later at the Reichstag, also in Augsburg.

Those negotiations, again led for the Imperial side by Ferdinand, were tortuous and encompassed many political subjects as well as the religious issue. Eventual agreement was only reached through a combination of compromise and pressure, so that the resulting peace of Augsburg of 1555 had many imprecisions and loopholes which were to be the source of subsequent disputes. Nevertheless for all its defects it was the principal reason why the Empire was able to avoid a major religious war for the next sixty years. This is all the more surprising in that many on both sides, but particularly the Catholics, viewed the religious divide as temporary and were still expecting a reunification at some not too far distant time. The agreement was thus not intended to perpetuate the split, but to prevent it from descending into open warfare in the interim. The term 'peace' was also something of a misnomer, as there was little thought of peace or tolerance in a wider sense, but only of avoiding this greater evil.

Rather confusingly, the Augsburg Confession of 1530 was the key document underlying the peace of Augsburg of 1555, as this provided the definition of the form of Protestantism which was to acquire legal rights within the Empire. Apart from the Catholics, only those whose doctrines conformed to the Confession qualified for future toleration and protection, a limitation which became problematic once the Reformation started to sub-divide, as only the Lutherans really met the test. Although the Anabaptists and smaller groups had established themselves to a limited extent in parts of the Empire, Calvinism had scarcely reached Germany by 1555, so that these variants were not so much specifically excluded as ignored by the peace. The Calvinists later argued that their theology did in fact comply, but this position became increasingly untenable as they gained strength, including recruiting a few princes, and thereby provoked growing Lutheran hostility.

Princes were central to the terms of the peace, as it was to them rather than to the wider population that a degree of religious tolerance was to be extended. Moreover they were accorded a *ius reformandi*, a right of reformation, enabling them to determine not only their own confession but that of all their subjects, a power which was later summed up in the well-known legal formula *cuius regio, eius religio*. Subjects who did not wish to conform were granted the right to emigrate with their possessions to a territory espousing their own religion, although as Asch notes this was scarcely a privilege, as banishment was normally one of the severest punishments a court could inflict.¹⁰

There were two limitations on the *ius reformandi*, the first being the ecclesiastical reservation, which provided that while an ecclesiastical

ruler could change his personal religion he must immediately resign his office. This was intended to ensure that ecclesiastical territories remained permanently Catholic, thus severely hampering further progress of the Reformation within the Empire, and also to secure the Catholic hold on the ecclesiastical electorates of Cologne, Mainz and Trier, thus helping to retain a Catholic majority in future Imperial elections. Ferdinand forced this reservation into the peace despite strong Protestant opposition, partly by threatening to break off the negotiations and partly by offering a concession in return.

This, the second limitation and later known as the *Declaratio Ferdinandeae*, restricted the right of ecclesiastical rulers to determine their subjects' religion by providing that nobles and towns which were already Protestant at the time of the peace would be entitled to remain so. Free Imperial cities where there were confessional divisions were also to be granted freedom of religion, although this applied only to a few, as most were either wholly Lutheran or wholly Catholic.¹¹ The Protestant side accepted this, but while the ecclesiastical reservation was written into the peace the declaration was not, and nor was it submitted to the Kammergericht for ratification as law in the usual way, so that its status was subsequently open to dispute.

The point which became a bone of contention almost immediately, and which was still a major issue three-quarters of a century later, concerned church property. On the basis of the assumed temporary nature of the religious divide, and hence of the settlement, the potential ramifications had not been clearly thought through, so that the peace of Augsburg merely provided that Catholic church property which had already been secularised at the time of the peace of Passau in 1552 was to remain in Protestant hands. Nothing was said about further secularisations, which, claimed the Catholics, meant that none were permissible, whereas the Protestants countered that this argument was incompatible with the central provision of the peace, the *ius reformandi*. As rulers were entitled to convert their whole territories to Protestantism this must, they maintained, include the ecclesiastical institutions within them, accompanied naturally by their property. There were many large and wealthy abbeys, monasteries and convents, even entire bishoprics, often with extensive lands, which did not themselves stand directly below the emperor but had an intermediate overlord, and were thus at risk should the latter become a Protestant. Many had indeed already done so, particularly in northern Germany, but also in the large principalities of Hessen in the centre and Württemberg in the south west. The issue was not so much religion, as the relevant populations were

liable to forced conversion in any case, but principally lands and the income derived from them, and as such it quickly became central to the enduring confessional antagonism. Secularisations continued, and some of these were contested in the Imperial law courts, giving rise to a number of long-drawn-out cases in which the interpretation of the ill-defined provisions of the peace of Augsburg was the central problem.

Nevertheless the first twenty years after the conclusion of the peace were relatively quiet, which is often attributed to an anxiety among the princes and bishops who had been in office during the Schmalkaldic wars to avoid a further crisis. Both Emperor Ferdinand I, who died in 1564, and his son and successor Maximilian II have also been viewed as personally half-inclined towards Protestantism, and during their reigns they maintained a more even-handed approach to the confessions than was the case before or afterwards. This changed with the accession of Emperor Rudolf II in 1576, as at least initially he was much more openly a Catholic partisan, although as he grew older and increasingly eccentric his personal religion became as unfathomable as much else about him. By the mid-1570s there was also a new generation of prince bishops in office, and a number of these, notably in central Germany and Franconia, began to take a more aggressive approach to enforcing Catholicism or emigration in their domains, relying in so doing on their *ius reformandi* but frequently ignoring the countervailing rights accorded to the Protestant nobility and some towns by the accompanying *Declaratio Ferdinandea*.

This new Catholic militancy reflected the internal reforms and regeneration which had been forced on the church by the challenge of the Reformation. The Council of Trent had commenced its deliberations for the purpose as far back as 1545, leading to the issue of decrees in 1563 which redefined Catholicism, thereby laying the foundations for the Counter-Reformation. The Society of Jesus (Jesuits), founded in 1540, also quickly became a powerful agent for the propagation of Catholic revival. Hence by the 1570s the church had regrouped to stop the loss of lands and people in the Empire, and it had indeed started to recover some of what had been lost. In the same period Calvinism began to spread into Germany, most notably with the conversion of the leading secular prince of the Empire, Elector Friedrich III of the Palatinate, in the early 1560s. Although their numbers remained relatively small the Calvinists quickly became disproportionately influential, particularly since, as Schmidt notes, they adopted 'a markedly more dynamic approach in which further advance for the Reformation

was the objective, rather than merely seeking to defend the confessional status quo'.¹²

As a result the Lutherans found themselves under pressure from two sides at a time when they were already facing a crisis. Following the death of Luther himself in 1546 there was no central doctrinal authority, and conflicting theological views threatened to lead to splits, which would have been particularly dangerous as the peace of Augsburg gave protection only to those Protestants who subscribed to the Augsburg Confession. The Lutheran princes were more alert to the risk than the theologians, and only they had the authority to bring the disputatious clerics to heel. Hence, led by the elector of Saxony, they provided the impetus for the discussions which eventually led to the Formula of Concord of 1577 and the corresponding Book of Concord of 1580, which in due course was subscribed to by 50 princes, 38 free Imperial cities and more than 8000 pastors. Nevertheless, and well illustrating the problem, this comprised only about two-thirds of German Lutherans, and the Concord was also not accepted in the Scandinavian countries or England.¹³ Moreover it was 'a rigidly anti-Calvinist confession of faith which made compromise between the two principal groups in German Protestantism impossible once and for all', and by the early years of the seventeenth century Lutheran theologians in Saxony and elsewhere considered the Calvinists to be worse enemies than the Catholics.¹⁴

The Empire, 1580 to 1603

Disputes were not unusual in the Empire, and indeed there was a long history of clashes, particularly over property and inheritances, which had not only kept the Imperial courts busy but had also sometimes erupted into localised violence. Confessional differences added a new source of conflict in the mid-sixteenth century, as well as frequently becoming an additional factor in quarrels which were not inherently concerned with religious issues. For several decades such dissension was largely confined to the local level, but this started to change in the 1580s.

The first issue to escalate into a political confrontation concerned the rights of ecclesiastical territories which had fallen under Protestant control. The separation of the spiritualities and the temporalities of a see was a long-established principle, so that following a new election the pope confirmed a bishop in his spiritual office, whereas the feudal overlord confirmed his rights in respect of the associated lands. Such things often moved slowly in medieval and early modern times, but

while papal confirmation was awaited the overlord could make provision for the lands through a *Lehnsindult*, a dispensation providing the necessary temporal authority on an interim basis. The peace of Augsburg provided that a prelate who changed his religion had to resign his office, but a different problem arose when, as later began to happen, cathedral chapters elected bishops or administrators who were already Protestants. Clearly such appointees were not going to receive papal confirmation, but in these circumstances Emperor Maximilian II had circumvented the problem and avoided confrontation by issuing them with a *Lehnsindult*, which not only enabled them to act in their capacity as temporal rulers but also served as credentials in relevant cases, qualifying the holder to take his seat and vote in meetings of Imperial institutions. When the more strictly Catholic Rudolf II came to the throne in 1576 he refused to follow this practice.

Lutheranism established itself early in the large and wealthy archbishopric of Magdeburg, but it was not until the early 1560s that the archbishop himself converted. When he died in 1566 the cathedral chapter elected as administrator his nephew, the Protestant son and heir of the elector of Brandenburg, who had thus been in office for some sixteen years by the time of the Reichstag meeting of 1582. Without either papal confirmation or a *Lehnsindult* from the emperor, however, he was then refused his seat and not allowed to participate, a precedent which was thereafter extended to other Protestant administrators. This created a furore, but the consequences were not to acquire practical significance until six years later.

Instead the focus shifted to Cologne, scene of one of the very few military conflicts within the Empire between the peace of Passau in 1552 and the start of the Thirty Years War in 1618. Here the problem started with the archbishop, Gebhard Truchsess, who in 1582 not only converted to Lutheranism (or Calvinism, as some say) but married, moreover announcing his intention not to resign but to continue as ruler and administrator of his secularised territory. This was not only seen as outrageous but also had major implications, as Cologne was one of the seven electorates, and if it switched sides it would create a Protestant majority in the Imperial electoral college. Truchsess had only been elected five years before, in a close and disputed vote which pitted the supporters of the candidacy of Ernst of Bavaria, brother of the ruling duke, against his own more liberal supporters who were not inclined to the strict Catholicism of the Bavarians. His conversion not only reactivated this split in the cathedral chapter, but also gave rise to a corresponding split in the landed nobility of the territory, so

that within a few months in early 1583 Truchsess was excommunicated by the pope, replaced by Ernst of Bavaria in a chapter election, and supported by the Estates of the Westphalian section of his lands. His opponents had already resorted to arms, commencing what became known as the Cologne or Bishops' War, a somewhat exaggerated title for a series of small-scale clashes, mostly during 1583 but with flare-ups later in the decade, and continuing until 1590. In this Ernst was supported by Bavarian money and Spanish troops from the Netherlands, while Truchsess received aid from the Calvinist Palatinate and military assistance from the Dutch. Hence Cologne became a fringe theatre of war in the Spanish–Dutch conflict, although there were no battles and action was confined to sieges of towns and castles, despite which there was much accompanying plundering and damage. Truchsess had the worst of it, being forced to flee to Holland at one stage, and he eventually gave up and withdrew. The episode became a *cause célèbre*, but it is worth noting that in this case Truchsess's conduct was in clear breach of the ecclesiastical reservation in the peace of Augsburg, as he should have resigned his offices and lands on becoming a Protestant. Moreover, given that he was a relatively conformist Catholic beforehand, it appears that religious principle had less to do with his switch than his romantic liaison with a noble lady who was herself in Protestant religious orders, and whose relatives were determined that she should not become a mere mistress.¹⁵

The next dispute arose in 1588, this time hinging around the exclusion of the administrator of Magdeburg from the Reichstag six years earlier. As noted above, the Visitation Commission which served as the final appeal body for the highest court in the Empire, the Kammergericht, comprised members nominated in turn by relevant members of the Reichstag. In 1588 Magdeburg's turn came round, but as the administrator was still barred from his seat his nominee for the commission was likewise excluded. The opposing confessional groups could not agree on how to proceed next, leading the Imperial chancellor, the elector of Mainz, acting on the emperor's authority, to close the session, thereby adjourning further consideration until the next meeting a year later. The result then was the same, so that with no compromise between Catholics and Protestants in sight the appeal process came to a standstill, meaning that judgements of the Kammergericht could no longer be finally confirmed in controversial cases.

Some five years later two further local disturbances attracted wider attention. The first of these was relatively minor, starting in 1592 following the death of the bishop of Strasbourg. Rather than a disputed

election as had initially occurred in Cologne, the cathedral chapter here split into two factions, Protestant and Catholic, each of which claimed the election for its own candidate. In the Protestant case this was the fifteen-year-old second son of the elector of Brandenburg's heir, whereas the Catholic majority elected the second son of the duke of Lorraine. An armed confrontation followed, but little actual fighting, as in the following year a truce was agreed on the basis that the claimants split the bishopric, one taking mainly the lands on the left, the other mainly those on the right of the Rhine.

The second case had a longer previous history. The free Imperial city of Aachen had an important status in the Empire, as emperors designate had traditionally been crowned as kings of the Romans there, but it was also a city divided between the confessions. Although it remained Catholic as the Reformation progressed it nevertheless accepted Protestant immigrants, particularly from Flanders and Artois, who helped to develop the economy but also began to make converts. Following the peace of Augsburg in 1555 the Protestants sought unsuccessfully to have Aachen included in the small group of free cities where both confessions were recognised, while their efforts to secure the right to open worship, with their own church and pastor, gave rise to complaints and Imperial pressures which induced the council to impose restrictions, barring non-Catholics from holding any civic offices in 1560.

Despite this the relatively tolerant climate in the city continued to attract immigration, as when in 1567 the entire Calvinist community from Maastricht moved in. By the 1570s some 40 per cent of the population were Protestants, both immigrants and converts, and they were well established in the upper levels of society and in the guilds, as well as having become economically indispensable to the city. In 1574 the council revoked the prohibition on non-Catholic office-holders, and although this was officially to benefit only those who subscribed to the Augsburg Confession that was no more than a gesture to accommodate practical politics in the Empire at the time. In consequence the confessions had reached parity on the council by 1576, with the Protestants sometimes actually in the majority.¹⁶

These developments increasingly discomfited the rulers of the neighbouring Catholic territories, including the duke of Jülich, who as the emperor's official representative in his capacity as overlord of the free city had a particular interest in Aachen. Complaints both from the duke and from the Catholic hierarchy to the new Emperor Rudolf II led to a rather desultory Imperial inquiry, but the council nevertheless felt it prudent to take a harder line. This they did in 1580, when they

again refused to allow the Protestants a church and moreover banned their preaching, both openly and within the confines of private houses, although they still held to their earlier decision to allow Protestants access to civic offices.

Previously the city had been generally peaceful apart from minor inter-confessional disturbances, but matters then escalated and a more significant riot took place, followed by further political action. Protestant mayors had occasionally been elected before without creating a problem, but in 1581 the Catholic and Protestant factions on the council each 'elected' their own candidates to office. Although a compromise was later reached some of the Catholic office-holders moved out and set up a form of government in exile in Jülich, while renewed complaints were made to the emperor, and as a result the city was for a time blockaded by forces under the duke of Jülich and the bishop of Liège.¹⁷

In early 1583 the Protestant-controlled council went further by authorising the open practice of religion which conformed to the Augsburg Confession. This raised not only the religious issue itself but also the question of the right of a free city, as opposed to its overlord, the emperor, to make changes to the religious status quo. Further commissions of enquiry followed, and the matter increasingly became embroiled in the wider inter-confessional dispute in the Empire. The process moved very slowly, until eventually in 1593 the Hofrat found against the city, threatened it with the Imperial ban, and demanded the restitution of the situation as it had been in 1560.¹⁸ The council did not comply, but even then the ban was not ratified by the emperor and implemented until 1598, when troops were sent to besiege the city, the council revoked its authorisation of Protestant worship before resigning, and a new, completely Catholic council was installed. Some leading Protestants were expelled and their chapels and schools were closed, thus settling the issue for another decade.¹⁹

As the century drew to a close, law suits over church property in Protestant territories continued to occupy the Kammergericht and to give new prominence to the problem of the stalemate in the appeals mechanism. This came to a head during the late 1590s, when the 'four cloisters' cases were made the subject of a confrontation initiated by the Palatinate and other militant Protestant territories. Two monasteries and two convents were involved, and in two cases these had been secularised and the claim was for their return, while in the other two the issue was interference in the affairs of the religious institutions by the Protestant secular authorities.²⁰ The defendants ranged from the important margrave of Baden to a minor count, the free Imperial city

of Strasbourg and an individual Imperial knight. Cases with a religious element were subject to a special procedure of the Kammergericht dating back to the peace of Augsburg of 1555, whereby they were heard not in the ordinary way but by a bench comprising three Catholic and three Protestant judges, and if necessary in case of deadlock by a second similar bench. Previously this procedure had worked well, and in all four of these cases the initial panel of judges reached majority verdicts in favour of the ecclesiastical plaintiffs. All the defendants refused to comply, and the cases eventually ended up at appeal.

The Visitation Commission had ceased to function some ten years earlier, but by the late 1590s an alternative had been improvised. This was the Deputation, the twenty-member principal sub-committee of the Reichstag, which as a standing body could meet and function between meetings of the Reichstag itself, and in 1600 and 1601 it attempted to resolve the appeals in the four cases. Inevitably, given the confessional divide and the contentious nature of secularisations, it proved impossible to reach consensus decisions, but the more militant Protestant members were not prepared to allow the Catholic majority to prevail. Led by the Palatinate, Brandenburg and Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, they blocked the working of the committee, so that it was unable to reach any valid decision. The Deputation had been the last resort, and with this now hamstrung there was no remaining appeals mechanism, so that the Kammergericht, a key Imperial institution, was unable to function properly in the future in respect of controversial cases.

This dispute continued in 1603, when the Reichstag met again. The assembly at least approved the emperor's main requirement, taxation for the war against the Turks, but an attempt to have the full Reichstag resolve the court cases left outstanding by the stalemate at the Deputation foundered again on the resistance of the Palatinate, which threatened to bring the whole Reichstag to a standstill. Hence the emperor could only obtain the closing resolutions necessary to give effect to the tax and other decisions of the meeting by excluding the disputed issues and deferring them to the next meeting.

The Empire, 1604 to 1618

Inter-confessional strife moved one step closer to actual hostilities when disturbances in the otherwise insignificant town of Donauwörth escalated into another *cause célèbre*. There had been religiously motivated brawls in a number of free Imperial cities in previous years, and on occasion the emperor and the Hofrat had issued orders to restrain the

Protestant councils involved, while in one case, that of Kaufbeuren in 1604, Duke Maximilian I of Bavaria had been authorised to intervene to enforce the order. Nevertheless these had been relatively minor incidents without any significant repercussions.

Despite its modest size Donauwörth too was a free Imperial city, and it was also one of the small number in which both main confessions had established rights under the terms of the peace of Augsburg. However it was situated uncomfortably on the border of the large and important duchy of Bavaria, and not far from the substantial territory of the bishopric of Augsburg. The Protestant-controlled council had for a number of years been applying irksome restrictions to the small Catholic minority, and the proximity of these powerful co-religionist neighbours seems to have encouraged the latter eventually to assert their rights, perhaps in turn provoking the council to act correspondingly firmly against them. In any event, when the monks of the nearby Heilig-Kreuz (Holy Cross) monastery proposed to hold a procession through the city on St Mark's Day, 25 April 1606, the council refused to allow them to enter with their banners flying, and in the resulting scuffle the parade was broken up and the banners were destroyed. The bishop of Augsburg complained to the Hofrat, leading the emperor to threaten the city with the Imperial ban if Catholic rights were not respected in the future. Despite this, much the same happened in April 1607, when as well as the monks two Bavarian representatives who had been sent as observers were also unceremoniously turned out of the city. Consequently in August of that year the Hofrat placed Donauwörth under the ban for a breach of the peace in the Empire.

Instead of making immediate submission the city council unwisely decided to wait for action to be taken against it, and Emperor Rudolf II and the Hofrat then appointed Maximilian of Bavaria to carry out an enforcement. This was a breach of procedure, as the director of the Swabian circle, to which Donauwörth belonged, should have been given this responsibility, but he, the duke of Württemberg, was a Lutheran. The council rejected Maximilian's initial approach, in response to which he occupied the city with an unnecessarily large number of troops on 16 December 1607, informing the council that these would only be withdrawn when they had paid his military expenses. As these amounted to many times the city's total revenues, and it was already heavily indebted, this was something which they would never be able to do. The Swabian circle and many Protestant principalities objected strongly, complaining to the emperor about the unlawful procedure in enforcing the judgement and the effective take-over of the town

by Bavaria, but Rudolf ignored all protests, and moreover he later granted Maximilian the town as a pledge for his expenses. The duke had not waited, quietly converting Donauwörth into a Bavarian town from the first months of his occupation, when he instructed the council to remove all references to being a free Imperial city from their documents and official seal.²¹ On religion he initially moved more cautiously, before eventually forbidding Lutheran worship and causing a considerable number of the population to emigrate.

News of the seizure of Donauwörth was still fresh when the Reichstag met in Regensburg barely a month later, in January 1608. As ever, the emperor's first concern was money, and even though a twenty-year truce had been agreed with the Turks in 1606 Rudolf was still seeking taxes to pay off some of the accumulated debts from the earlier years of war. By then it was a long-established practice for Estates, and not just in the Empire, to counter princely requests for taxation with demands for concessions on other matters, so the Protestant group, led once again by the Palatinate, duly responded by seeking greater rights for Calvinists and an increase in Protestant representation on the Hofrat. They also put forward a proposition that the Reichstag should formally reconfirm the peace of Augsburg, which in their opinion had been brought into question by the most recent Catholic actions, particularly over Donauwörth. The young Archduke Ferdinand of Styria, the later emperor, was Rudolf's official representative at the meeting, and he took up this demand, but only in order to give it a different thrust. A reconfirmation of the Augsburg peace had also to include the ecclesiastical reservation, he maintained, as well as being accompanied by the return of all church properties which had been secularised since 1552. This argument, eagerly taken up by the Catholic majority in the Reichstag, aroused a furious reaction from the Protestants, although it was, says Parker, a bargaining move intended to force the latter to be more accommodating on other issues, particularly taxation, in order to have it withdrawn.²² Neither side was inclined to compromise, and the protracted dispute eventually culminated in a Palatinate-led walkout, supported by Brandenburg, Ansbach, Kulmbach, Baden-Durlach, Hessen-Kassel and Württemberg, so that Ferdinand was forced to dissolve the meeting.

Barely a week later, in May 1608, most of the same group who had walked out met at the nearby secularised monastery of Auhausen, where they quickly agreed to form an alliance with the declared purpose of defending the rights of all members within the Empire against unlawful attacks. The Palatinate and Hessen-Kassel, both with Calvinist princes,

had long favoured some form of military self-help, but the recent events had persuaded some more moderate Lutheran princes to support the move, notably Baden-Durlach and Württemberg, the last named in particular having about a third of his territory at risk were secularised church lands to be repossessed.²³ Because of the differences between the Calvinists and the Lutherans the resulting Union, which was to last for ten years in the first instance, did not formally identify itself as a Protestant body, although it is usually referred to as the Protestant Union for reasons of clarity. A special tax levy on the members was to provide the means to raise a paid army in the event of need, and the Palatinate took on both the political directorate and the military command, although theoretically this was to change every three years. Membership subsequently grew to nine princely territories and seventeen free Imperial cities, among them Nuremberg, Ulm and Strasbourg. Nevertheless most Protestant principalities, particularly those in the north, and including the strongest Protestant power in the Empire, the electorate of Saxony, did not join.

The Catholic response was predictable, and fourteen months later, in July 1609, the Catholic League was founded in Munich. Like the Union, its support was drawn mainly from southern Germany, and the great majority of its members were ecclesiastical entities. The three Catholic electorates from further north, Cologne, Mainz and Trier, did not join immediately, although they did so soon afterwards. Bavaria was the only secular principality of significance in its ranks but it nevertheless provided most of the funds, while Maximilian was the leading, indeed the dominant, personality and the military commander. Nevertheless the League, like the Union, declared itself from the outset to be a purely defensive alliance, and it is argued that the number of smaller entities joining one or other reflected a widespread belief that the institutions of the Empire were no longer able to protect their rights.²⁴ Ironically the foundation of the League was also the main factor bringing in new members to the Union, which had otherwise made little progress beyond the initial group.

The ink was scarcely dry on the first of these agreements when a new conflict arose in the Empire, although in this case the main issue was property, while the dispute escalated for reasons which were chiefly political although with religious overtones. The dissension over the Cleves-Jülich inheritance concerned a large group of territories in north-west Germany, mainly on the lower Rhine, comprising the duchies of Jülich, Cleves and Berg, together with the counties of Mark and Ravensberg, all ruled from the duke's capital of Düsseldorf. The ruling

family was Catholic, although both religions coexisted in the territories, but the duke was mentally incapacitated and had no children, so that even in his lifetime a dispute over the prospective inheritance had begun. Eight or more contenders had claims of some kind, but two were better placed than the others, and the emperor was involved as potentially responsible for an adjudication. As the territories were on the border of the Netherlands the neighbouring powers were also interested parties, not least because of the route of the Spanish supply road through the region. Thus Spain wanted a Catholic ruler whereas the United Provinces wanted a Protestant, while France was principally concerned to secure an outcome which would avoid any strengthening of the Habsburg position.

The duke died in March 1609, whereupon the two leading claimants, both Lutherans, Elector Johann Sigismund of Brandenburg and Wolfgang Wilhelm, son of the duke of Pfalz-Neuburg, each set about trying to gain control of as much of the territory as possible, place by place, until an Imperial commissioner arrived with a mandate to head an interim government pending a resolution of the claims. This was most unwelcome to both contenders, particularly as the emperor was thought to favour a third powerful claimant, the Lutheran elector of Saxony, for political reasons, so they promptly made an agreement to rule jointly until their respective claims were decided. Emperor Rudolf II declared their actions illegal and agreed to his 23-year-old cousin Archduke Leopold going to represent him, thereby increasing widespread suspicions that he intended to seize the territories before deciding the claims in a way which would serve Habsburg interests. Leopold, who was bishop of both Passau and Strasbourg although more interested in military adventures than in his ecclesiastical duties, dashed to Jülich, but with only a small force of soldiers he quickly found himself blockaded in the fortress.

The two 'possessor princes', as they became known, had already raised small forces of their own, but their attempts to rally wider support, both within Germany and internationally, met with little success initially. Henri IV of France was the first to offer help, but his promises were vague and heavily conditional upon contributions from others, as well as upon the efforts of the claimants themselves. The Dutch were reluctant to take any action which might imperil their recently concluded truce with Spain, while James I of England was a determined proponent of peace but was in any case constrained by lack of money. The Palatinate, on the other hand, was as ready as ever to oppose Catholic Habsburg endeavours, but although some of the other princes were

sympathetic, without powerful external allies the new Protestant Union was not strong enough to contend with the assistance which Spain and Archduke Albrecht, the Habsburg regent in the Netherlands, were expected to provide to Leopold. Moreover the situation in Cleves-Jülich did not fall within the terms of the Union's strictly defensive constitution, and other members, particularly the cities, were strongly opposed to external entanglements.

The participation of France was clearly crucial, so the elector of the Palatinate's leading councillor, Prince Christian I of Anhalt-Bernburg, who had a long-standing personal connection with the king, was despatched to Paris in December 1609. There Christian somewhat misleadingly told Henri that the princes of the Union had decided to recruit a small army, which together with the claimants' own forces would amount to some 10,000 men. The response far exceeded his expectations, as Henri agreed to match all the forces raised in Germany, a promise which in turn was highly significant in persuading the Union actually to raise their proposed army. Even so there was considerable opposition at the Union meeting which followed in January, and efforts to whip up religious anxieties, together with the personal presence of most of the leading princes to over-awe the humbler representatives of the cities, were necessary to secure agreement.²⁵

The resulting potential army of 20,000 men should have been equal to the task, but contributions from England and the United Provinces were still desirable in order to present the planned intervention as being carried out by a broad international coalition, acting in the name of justice in order to prevent the claimant princes being deprived of their rightful inheritances by Habsburg autocracy. Both countries remained reluctant, but diplomatic pressure over the following few months, particularly from Henri, eventually persuaded them to agree, the Dutch influenced by the fact that French support played an important part in their struggle against Spain, and James I probably by prestige considerations.

In the event Henri set about raising not the 10,000 troops he had promised, but twice as many, as he himself confirmed, but without providing a convincing explanation. However he had for some time been negotiating with the duke of Savoy, a shifty but ambitious prince with a territory extending from north-west Italy into part of modern France, encouraging him to break off relations with Spain and instead join an alliance aiming at an attack on the Spanish province of Milan. How serious Henri was in this cannot now be said, but the prospect certainly alarmed the Spanish, for whom Milan was even more important

than the Netherlands, and the resulting diversion of their attention may indeed have been one of Henri's objectives.

Spain had in any case been very reluctant to become involved in military action over Cleves-Jülich, not least because of financial difficulties, while Archduke Albrecht had troops available but no money for their wages, so that he feared to mobilise them in case this provoked another of their recurrent pay mutinies. Nor did Emperor Rudolf II, locked in a power struggle with his brother Matthias, have any resources to send to help Leopold, so that the latter's increasingly desperate appeals for men and money met with no response.²⁶ He fared no better with the Catholic League. The developing dispute had been an additional factor in its foundation in July 1609 and in persuading further members to join later in that year, but the majority held to their view of the League as a purely defensive organisation, and they resisted Leopold's pleas for help in Jülich. He did raise some troops in his own bishopric of Strasbourg, but these were neutralised by two incursions into Alsace by forces from member princes of the Union, although little more than minor skirmishes took place.

The key question was whether Henri IV would actually intervene, and if so what response this would provoke from Spain. By the spring of 1610 he had his large army ready for action, and many contemporaries feared that a local inheritance dispute might be about to develop into a full-scale war fought on Empire territory, but mainly by outsiders who had no actual involvement in the initial issue. Then on 10 May Henri was assassinated in Paris by a Catholic extremist, his widow became regent for his young son, and the army did not march.

Left to play *Hamlet* without the prince of Denmark, the coalition engaged in frantic diplomatic activity in order to persuade the new French government to participate nevertheless, while the Spanish made corresponding efforts to have the attack on Leopold in Jülich called off, but took no military action apart from reinforcing their own defences. Eventually France did provide a much reduced army, rather smaller than Henri had originally promised, but this set out late and made slow progress towards Jülich. Meanwhile a combined force of a reported 16,000 men reached the city from Holland at the end of July, two-thirds of them provided by the Dutch and most of the remainder by England, together with a smaller French contingent, although both the latter units were already serving in the Netherlands rather than being newly despatched. At Jülich they were joined by the Union army, combining to make a force much larger than necessary for the siege and reduction of the fortifications, which nevertheless took five weeks, during

which rivalry was as much in evidence as cooperation between the attackers, while the main French army arrived just in time to share in the honours. Leopold himself had already slipped away, and his heavily outnumbered garrison surrendered the fortress at the beginning of September in return for their own free passage out. The Catholic League had belatedly raised a considerable army but had not deployed it, and once it became clear that the Union had no further military intentions they too demobilised.

Whether a major war would really have broken out had Henri not been assassinated is one of history's great imponderables, as despite many theories no-one really knows what his intentions were. The question is further complicated by the fact that during the key period when Henri was making preparations to intervene in Jülich he was also involved in a bitter dispute with both the Spanish government and Archduke Albrecht of the Netherlands, triggered by the 56-year-old king's romantic involvement with a girl of sixteen. With his prompting she had recently been married off to the young Prince Henri II de Condé, who as next in line to the throne after Henri's own sons was required to live at court, a convenient arrangement for pursuing the liaison. The prince, however, did not prove as accommodating as had been anticipated, and in November 1609 he absconded with his wife to take refuge in the Netherlands. There the embarrassed Archduke Albrecht reluctantly allowed the lady to stay but asked the prince to move on, eventually to Milan, where the Spanish government were happy to exploit Henri's problems by refusing all French requests for his return. Thus the negotiations surrounding the Cleves-Jülich dispute and the likelihood that if France intervened its army would march through Spanish Netherlands territory became entangled with the king's private passion, so that 'in his correspondence with his ambassadors and in his interviews with foreign envoys Henri passed from one question to the other as if the two were inextricable'.²⁷ Historians differ over the actual significance of this affair, but it does at least help to explain why Henri's aims were less than clear.²⁸

Nevertheless he will have been very conscious that France's long-drawn-out religious civil wars had ended barely ten years earlier, and the scars were far from healed, so that involvement in a war against Catholic powers and with entirely Protestant allies might well have provoked renewed internal troubles. Faced with the same problem, France under first his widow and then his son virtually withdrew from the international scene for most of the next twenty years. Clearly Henri did not want a strategically important territory not very far from France's

borders to fall under Habsburg control or influence, as seemingly threatened by the involvement of Archduke Leopold, but it is less easy to see what wider objectives he might have had. The increasingly accepted view is that he was aiming at a swift intervention in overwhelming force, both to secure the disputed duchies for the claimants and to prevent further escalation. This would have been precisely in order to avoid the outbreak of a major religious war which would have threatened French internal stability, while at the same time gaining prestige for France as an arbiter and peacemaker.²⁹ Even so it would have been a hazardous undertaking.

Left in possession of the disputed duchies at the end of 1610, the two claimants turned their efforts to outmanoeuvring each other in an attempt to gain the whole inheritance. Little of note occurred for the next three years, although in the course of 1613 each of them changed their personal religion. Wolfgang Wilhelm of Pfalz-Neuburg converted to Catholicism and married a Bavarian princess, while Elector Johann Sigismund of Brandenburg switched from Lutheran to Calvinist, although this was a less surprising move as many of his relations and advisers had been Calvinist for some time. Nevertheless his conversion met with opposition at home, including rioting in Berlin and disturbances in the Estates, so that he prudently agreed to tolerate both forms of Protestant worship in the future.

There was a last flurry of activity in 1614, as each of the claimants acquired the support of their new co-religionists. Spain backed Wolfgang Wilhelm while the Dutch sided with Brandenburg, and in 1614 they intervened militarily, the former taking the town of Wesel in the duchy of Cleves while the latter occupied the fortress of Jülich. They had their own interests principally in mind, as the territories were in a strategic position bordering on the Dutch Republic and the Spanish Netherlands, and troops of both powers had repeatedly occupied parts of them in the past. Nevertheless it was a precarious situation, and one which endangered the continuing twelve-year truce, but in the event neither side wished to resume the war at that point. With the help of French and English mediation a compromise was arranged between the claimants in November 1614, the treaty of Xanten, whereby Wolfgang Wilhelm gained Jülich and Berg, while Brandenburg acquired Cleves, Mark and Ravensberg. Hence the former two territories regained a Catholic ruler, while the latter group passed into the hands of a Calvinist, but religious considerations were less relevant than the willingness of the dynastic rivals to settle for what they could get, sharing the spoils rather than risking destroying them by engaging in an all-out war.

In an aside to this wrangle there was a resumption of activity in the religiously divided city of Aachen, where Catholic control had been reimposed by military force in 1598. Thereafter matters in the city gradually reverted to a confessional compromise, leading ten years later to a renewed dispute with the Jülich authorities. In 1608 the latter attempted a blockade of the city, while the Protestant citizens in turn exploited the subsequent Cleves-Jülich inheritance conflict to circumvent the religious restrictions which had been imposed on them, flocking out to attend services in areas newly under the control of the Protestant claimant princes. In July 1611 five citizens who had been particularly ostentatious in their defiance were expelled from the city, leading to rioting in which the Jesuit college and the city hall were attacked, following which a Protestant body was set up in opposition to the Catholic council. The resulting Imperial order demanding restitution was overtaken by the death of Emperor Rudolf II, and Protestant worship was again authorised in the subsequent inter-regnum under the far from impartial control of the Palatinate, when a new Calvinist-dominated council was also elected. This lasted only until the accession of Emperor Matthias, who duly issued an order to restore the situation imposed in 1598, compliance with which was ensured by the appearance of a Spanish army from the Netherlands outside the city in 1614.³⁰

The Reichstag meeting in Regensburg in 1613, five years after the previous one had been dissolved in deadlock, was Emperor Matthias's first, and his principal adviser Cardinal Khlesl, although formerly a protagonist of counter-Reformation, had recognised that seeking to re-establish a degree of stability was not only essential for the Empire but also in the interests of the Habsburgs in their own lands. Despite his conciliatory efforts, however, after the reading of the emperor's agenda the Protestant block, led by the Palatinate, presented a list of issues which they said should be resolved first, including the restitution of Donauwörth. Prolonged negotiations followed but these eventually broke down without achieving an agreement. Thus at the end of the session the required formal closing resolution, including taxation for defence against the Turks, was passed by a majority vote in which Saxony and other conservative Lutherans joined with the Catholics. The meeting was then adjourned until May 1614, but that meeting never took place. In fact the Reichstag did not meet again until 1640, not least because the Thirty Years War intervened.

2

An Inevitable War?

‘Were the last years before 1618 therefore a highroad to war?’ asks Asch, before adding that ‘they have certainly often been depicted as such’.¹ Parker has no doubt: ‘It is a source of wonderment to historians, as it was to contemporaries, that a general conflict did not break out between the already embattled parties in Germany for a whole decade after the Donauwörth incident, despite several serious clashes.’² Other historians, without being quite so specific, have described the events in the Empire in the latter years of the sixteenth and early years of the seventeenth centuries as representing a steadily building crisis to which the logical outcome was war. The familiar items appear, much as set out in the previous chapter: the Bishops’ War for Cologne, the exclusion of the administrator of Magdeburg and others from the Reichstag, the blocking of the Kammergericht appeals committees, the Donauwörth affair, the Reichstag walk-out of 1608, the formation of the Protestant Union and the Catholic League, the Cleves-Jülich succession dispute, and the breakdown of the Reichstag in 1613, all in the context of growing efforts at Counter-Reformation. Kampmann’s conclusion is clear:

The ever-sharper confessional conflict had led to the crippling of the key institutions of the Empire, and had brought all other conflicts within the Empire under its malign influence. That, summed up in a few words, is the central cause of the severe crisis in the Empire before the outbreak of the Thirty Years War.³

‘The crippling of the key institutions of the Empire’ is a recurrent theme among historians. Asch refers to ‘the cause of the breakdown of the Empire’s constitution before 1618, and thus of the war’, Schmidt notes that ‘all the institutional forums of Imperial politics were blocked’, and

Schormann, in discussing 'the struggle which led to the paralysis of all Imperial institutions', states that 'the eventual remaining alternatives were agreement on the basis of fundamental equality between the confessions, or war'.⁴ Nevertheless it is very questionable whether this apparent collapse of the political system was in fact as serious as is contended, and in particular whether it was sufficiently serious to be regarded as a principal cause of the Thirty Years War.

The key institutions of the Empire

The Imperial courts

For practical purposes the courts were the most important of the very limited range of Imperial institutions. Firstly they played a key part in enforcing Imperial law and the Imperial peace, as although actions against breaches were decreed by the emperor they were also validated by an order of a court, at this time usually the Hofrat. Secondly, and perhaps even more important, they were also the principal means of resolving disputes between all those individuals and entities standing directly below the emperor, and hence of avoiding a resort to violence. Thus the breakdown of the appeals system for the Kammergericht was certainly a serious matter. It did not, however, bring the administration of Imperial justice to a standstill, except perhaps in cases involving religiously contentious issues, and such cases were very much the minority, albeit attracting most of the attention. The Kammergericht continued to deal successfully with the great bulk of normal cases, and princes also increasingly took their disputes to the Hofrat, provided that they did not have a religious element.⁵

Recent research has provided a considerable range of evidence to support this observation. Thus Ehrenpreis reports that the number of active cases coming before the Kammergericht rose from about 250 per year in the 1580s to around 400 in the 1590s, while there was only a small decline thereafter. However the number of what he regards as the most important cases, on the basis that they were the subject of three or more hearings in a calendar year, continued to increase in the early 1600s.⁶ Ranieri shows that while the number of cases in the twenty years after 1600 was a little over 10 per cent down compared to the previous two decades, a figure well within the range of longer-term chronological fluctuations, it was nevertheless more than 20 per cent higher than in 1560–1579.⁷ Far from being crippled after the breakdown of the appeals system in 1601, Orlieb and Polster observe that the figures 'confirm that a "long" sixteenth century, up to about 1620,

must be regarded as the “century of the Reichskammergericht”.⁸ Its main problem remained the long-standing one of its extreme slowness. Baumann indicates that in the first decade of the seventeenth century half the cases at the Kammergericht had lasted over five years, and a quarter over ten years.⁹

Prior to 1620 the Kammergericht had a greater workload than the Hofrat, but after that date the latter became the busier court as more cases were referred to it, probably not least because its processes were somewhat less slow. Further analysis of the figures provided by Ortlieb and Polster’s research shows that for the seventy years from 1550 to 1619 the number of new cases at the Hofrat, although fluctuating sharply from year to year, was broadly stable as a ten-year rolling average. Although the caseload declined appreciably during the 1580s it increased again in the 1590s and beyond, so that in each of the two decades 1600–1609 and 1610–1619 the number was well above the average for the previous half century. Combining the figures for the two courts, the Kammergericht and the Hofrat, shows that they were only marginally less active in 1600–1619 than in 1580–1599, but substantially busier than in previous periods.¹⁰

Given that many of the appellants to these courts were the high and mighty, those owing fealty directly to the emperor, among them ruling princes, it is clear that there was no general breakdown of confidence in the legal system in the years leading up to 1618. Thus in 1613 the bishop of Würzburg felt it worth writing to the president of the Kammergericht pressing for an early decision in a case in which he was involved.¹¹ Nor were the litigants limited to Catholics. In the period from 1590 to 1621 there were some six hundred cases at the Hofrat involving those who were or became members of the Protestant Union, although there was a reduction in the number from 1615 onwards, which Ehrenpreis attributes to a general decline in tension under Emperor Matthias.¹² Wilson shares this latter view, noting that ‘the number of complaints about breaches of the religious peace dropped dramatically after 1612’, while by 1614 the efforts of Matthias’s leading minister, Cardinal Khlesl, ‘had reconciled most Protestants to Imperial justice’.¹³ Thus complaints from the more politically minded of the Protestants about the growing influence of the Hofrat, Catholic-dominated and under the emperor’s personal control, largely fizzled out in the early 1600s. Embarrassingly, a number of princes had to decline involvement in those protests on the grounds that they either had or were proposing to use the court themselves, including Landgrave Moritz of Hessen-Kassel, a leading Calvinist figure in the Palatinate-led opposition within the Empire.¹⁴ His Lutheran

rival Ludwig V of Hessen-Darmstadt also resorted to the court, commencing an action against Moritz around 1605, the beginning of a long-running case which later escalated into open warfare between the two branches of the family.¹⁵

The problem of the courts thus reduces to cases with religious or political implications, frequently intertwined, of which the troubles arising in the cities, notably Aachen and particularly Donauwörth, were by far the most prominent. Here the issue was not that the administration of Imperial law had broken down, but rather the converse, that it functioned all too effectively to the detriment of the Protestants. These were, however, isolated examples. Only Donauwörth became a major issue, but even here the focus of protest was the emperor himself as the controlling figure, rather than the Hofrat which formalised the actions.

Otherwise the most contentious cases almost all centred ultimately around secularisations of church property, and the simple fact that in an acquisitive age Protestant princes, knights and cities wanted to hold on to the substantial lands and other assets which they had largely fortuitously come by during the course of the Reformation, while the Catholic prelates wanted them back. In many cases the courts were not well placed to arbitrate, as the underlying law, the peace of Augsburg, was at best ambiguous and at worst silent on the relevant points. Because of the circumstances in which secularisations could occur they were bound to set Protestants against Catholics, and as neither side was prepared to accept adverse judgements 'beating the religious drum' was the most promising way of contesting them, while for the Calvinist militants and long-standing foes of the Habsburg emperors they were a convenient issue around which to rally opposition.

A number of controversial cases remained unresolved as appeals from the Kammergericht mounted up, but although a few involved newer disputes most stemmed ultimately from secularisations which had taken place decades earlier, while the prelates, monks and nuns directly concerned had died, dispersed or indeed themselves converted long since. The most prominent of the cases in the 'four cloisters' dispute of the late 1590s, which became the centre of the Protestant militants' attack on the appeals system, had been before the Kammergericht since 1556, while the basis of another dated back to the 1560s.¹⁶ These were not live issues, and although their specific outcomes mattered to the parties concerned they were of little wider importance. The real significance lay in the much larger number and value of secularised church properties in the hands of Protestant rulers which were not themselves yet before

the courts, but which were implicitly threatened by Catholic claims for restitution if precedents were set. As time had passed possession had begun to seem like nine points of the law, but the Protestant holders of the properties still felt insecure enough to back the politically motivated agitators in an effort to establish full legal ownership. On the other side many Catholic princes, including the ecclesiastical electors, feared that Protestant victories in the courts might trigger off new secularisations, putting even their own territories at risk. In the circumstances a legal stalemate may have been the lesser hazard.

The apprehensions of both sides, while understandable, nevertheless related primarily to future possibilities rather than to current events, as it is noteworthy that relevant cases mentioned in research literature almost all relate to disputes which originated well before 1600. Eighty years after Luther's Theses the tide had turned, so that new conversions among the prominent were more likely to be from Protestant to Catholic than vice versa. Likewise many princes had used their *ius reformandi* in the first quarter of a century after 1555 to enforce religious conformity in their domains, often taking over Catholic property as a result, but this had also run its course. On the other hand very few secularisations had actually been reversed, leaving the Protestants in practical possession of what they had gained. For a time at least, stalemate equated to stability.

It is also pertinent to note that while the most intractable cases remained deadlocked many others, even ones with religious aspects, continued to be settled. In the 1590s the Hofrat frequently appointed commissioners to mediate between the parties, often successfully, thus avoiding the need for a formal verdict. The Kammergericht also sought to facilitate compromises, even in the 'four cloisters' cases, or as in a dispute between the Protestant city of Nuremberg and the Catholic bishop of Bamberg, which started around 1591 and eventually reached the court, before finally being settled by agreement between the parties in 1607.¹⁷

Thus in the early years of the seventeenth century the courts were by no means crippled, and in the great majority of cases they continued to function essentially as before rather than contributing to a crisis of Imperial institutions. Ruthmann stresses the point: 'It must be accepted that the thesis of a "paralysis of Imperial justice" is not tenable. . . . At most one can speak of a partial incapacitation.'¹⁸ The inability to resolve a relatively small number of cases with religious implications, particularly concerning property, was certainly a serious weakness, but its main significance was the opportunity for making political capital

which it presented, so that it became one of the regular items in the litany of complaints presented to the Reichstag by the Palatinate and its allies.

The Reichstag

The Reichstag itself, although relevant as a forum, was actually of less practical significance than the courts, and well before the beginning of the seventeenth century the frequency of its meetings had already declined significantly. In the hundred years from 1450 to 1549 there were some forty meetings, but in the following fifty years there were only eleven, of which only four were in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. By then, according to Schlaich, 'the Reichstag had become an instrument for granting taxes, particularly for the Turkish wars, and that was the emperor's real interest in it'.¹⁹ Henri IV of France put it more bluntly, remarking caustically on the Reichstag meeting of 1608: 'As always, in the end it will just be hot air, and nothing will be achieved.'²⁰

To understand the problem it must be remembered that the Reichstag of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not a parliament, as it was not a representative institution but an assembly of all those in the Empire who stood directly below the emperor and also had the right to a seat and a vote. Its origins were as a consultative and advisory body, and in the medieval tradition it worked on the basis of consensus, so that the cumbersome procedure of debating in separate chambers of electors, princes and cities, and then seeking agreement between the chambers, was aimed at achieving this. In theory the participants committed themselves individually and voluntarily to decisions, including taxation, although they were then bound by the final resolution. The position of dissenters and absentees became less clear as time went on and consensus became more difficult to achieve. Formal protests were a long-established means of registering dissent, occurring frequently at Reichstag meetings although they had no legal status, and such a protest in the dispute over the Reformation at the meeting of 1529 was the source of the name 'Protestant' for the new confession. Withdrawing from the meeting before the final resolution was also used by some, notably in 1530, as a tactic and an excuse for claiming not to be bound by the decisions.²¹

As consensus became more difficult to achieve the question of majority voting came increasingly to the fore, and from 1582 onwards this was a central issue in the disputes between the Catholic majority and the Protestant minority, most particularly its activist and largely

Calvinist core. The concept of the majority being able to bind the minority encountered not only the theoretical difficulty of individuals supposedly entering into voluntary commitments, but also the practical problem of inequality between participants representing only themselves. Hence a minor abbot might have the same voting right in the chamber of princes as the ruler of a substantial territory, while the cities had no vote at all, even though they had to contribute a disproportionate share of taxation, the rights of their chamber being limited to commenting upon a position previously agreed between the chambers of electors and princes. Nevertheless majority voting was already established in meetings of the electors by the thirteenth century, and by the sixteenth century it was commonly used on questions of procedure, as well as in committees of the Reichstag. A majority decision could also be made under strict conditions in cases of urgency, but there was no wider formal provision for majority voting on substantive issues in the Reichstag itself. In earlier and less disputatious times it seems to have been accepted *de facto*, but in the late sixteenth century it became the subject of argument.

Although there was much talk of principle and of equality between the confessions, the main disputes in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries actually concerned money and property. In 1582 the Protestant activists objected that the majority in the Reichstag was made up of ecclesiastical members, most of whom contributed little to the tax levy and consequently enjoyed a 'cost-free vote'. Their complaint was politically as well as financially motivated, as any change would have altered the confessional balance in the Reichstag, but despite continuing challenges taxation for the Turkish wars was always approved eventually, even in 1613, the sole exception being 1608.²²

The other major issue, for the Reichstag as for the Kammergericht, was secularised church property, the central problem underlying the confrontation over Catholic domination of the appeals committee. For the Calvinist activists the issue was mainly political, but for many other Protestant princes it had large financial and territorial implications. This provided them with a strong vested interest in opposing majority voting in the Reichstag, particularly on what they claimed to be religious issues, a term which they defined so widely as to make compromise impossible. The resulting stalemate 'was exactly what the Protestants wanted', as it 'shielded them from restitution demands passed by a majority'.²³

The principal difference between the Reichstag meetings of 1608 and 1613 compared to the preceding ones was not the dispute over majority voting and the Kammergericht appeals system, but the twenty-year

truce with the Turks agreed in 1606. The war had provided a practical impetus towards agreement at the earlier meetings, as even the most extreme anti-Catholic, anti-Habsburg prince was not ready to see Christendom, even Austria, invaded by the Turks. Without such an external pressure the meetings quickly descended into a dialogue of the deaf between the militant Palatinate-led wing of the Protestants determined to parade their grievances, and the entrenched Catholic majority equally determined to avoid or at least to limit concessions to them. In 1608 the atmosphere was further embittered by the fact that the participants were already assembling in Regensburg as Maximilian of Bavaria's troops marched into Donauwörth on 16 December 1607, so that the meeting opened on 12 January against a background of up-to-the-minute and doubtless sensational accounts of the seizure of the city. Hence on this single occasion Saxony not only supported the Palatine approach but took the initiative in pressing Protestant demands.

In both 1608 and 1613 the activists debated at length as to how to respond to the pressure from the Catholic side for majority decisions. Would the conventional protests suffice, or should they resort to a walk-out, as in 1530? In 1608 some took the harder line and the most militant departed. Saxony and others of their persuasion remained, but they would not support decision-taking, particularly on taxation, in the absence of those who had left. The Catholic side decided not to press the issue, and the meeting was prorogued without a concluding resolution. It could be said that the Reichstag had broken down at that point, except for the fact that they all came back in 1613 and continued the arguments.

Those who were members of the Protestant Union met beforehand in 1613 to discuss whether or not to participate in the Reichstag, and it is significant that they decided to do so, albeit with the intention of presenting their demands in the form of an ultimatum. Equally noteworthy is that some progress was in fact made. The emperor's brother, Archduke Maximilian, led a series of negotiations, in course of which it was agreed that consideration of some of the problems could be deferred, including the call for the 'four cloisters' cases to be removed from the jurisdiction of the Kammergericht and its appeals committees. The three remaining demands were firstly that a revised structure and area of competence should be established for the Hofrat, secondly that all politically sensitive cases then before that court, including action against the Protestant council in Aachen, should in the meantime be suspended and referred to confessionally balanced arbitration, and thirdly that Donauwörth should be restored to its status as a free Imperial city.

Ultimately the discussions broke down because the Protestant militants were looking for concrete immediate commitments while the archduke could offer only general verbal assurances. These did, however, include the restoration of Donauwörth, subject to safeguards for the Catholics there, but the real sticking point was again money, the question of who was then to compensate Maximilian of Bavaria for his original expenses in occupying the city. Emperor Matthias also offered to call a meeting of the Deputation, the principal standing committee of the Reichstag, to consider the points which had been deferred. This was to take place the following spring, with the confessions equally represented instead of the usual in-built Catholic majority, but this was refused by the Palatinate and its allies, as they foresaw that they would still be outnumbered by a combination of Catholics and the conservatively minded Protestants led by Saxony.²⁴

Taxation was again an issue in 1613, although even Maximilian of Bavaria privately doubted its validity in view of the continuing truce with the Turks, and Bavaria was one of a number of Catholic participants proposing a substantially lower grant than was eventually agreed.²⁵ The final resolution of the Reichstag, together with a decision to adjourn until May 1614, was passed by a majority vote in which Saxony and its associates joined with the Catholics, while the militant Protestant group recorded their protests but did not depart beforehand as in 1608. Schlaich concludes:

1613 did not witness, as is said, a breakdown of the Reichstag. . . . The previous meeting in 1608 was terminated without passing the closing resolution, but this was done in the normal way at the Reichstag of 1613, even though vehement protests were registered. Moreover the participants immediately began to prepare their arguments for the next meeting.²⁶

That this did not take place in 1614 is not entirely surprising. The emperor had secured his tax grant in 1613 and another could not have been requested so soon, while time for reflection and diplomacy was required before returning to the other issues. However some have argued for the breakdown theory by pointing out that the next Reichstag meeting did not take place until 1640. This is misleading. From 1570 to 1613 meetings took place at intervals of around five years, with one gap of twelve years, so that another one would not have been expected much before 1618. In the interim Emperor Matthias and Cardinal Khlesl were actively seeking conciliation, both in the general interest

and with a view to smoothing the Habsburg succession to the Imperial crown. Events overtook them, in the form of the Bohemian revolt and Matthias's death. Thereafter Emperor Ferdinand II preferred to manage without the Reichstag, in essence because there was no chance of securing a grant of taxation in the absence of an external war against the Turks. Nor would the Protestant estates have voted for taxes during the internal conflict within the Empire, while the resources of their Catholic counterparts were committed to supporting the League army. Instead Ferdinand confined himself to a couple of meetings of the electors, and even these he called only when circumstances or pressure made it inevitable. Thus it was left to his successor to call the next Reichstag, three years after Ferdinand's death.

The Protestant activists of 1613 were still mostly the so-called 'corresponding princes' of the early 1590s who had formed the main opposition at the Reichstag meetings of 1598 and 1608, and who were also the principal members of the Protestant Union. The size of this group needs to be kept in perspective, as it comprised the princes of only five significant territories, the Palatinate, Brandenburg, Baden-Durlach, Hessen-Kassel and Württemberg, together with four minor ones, Anhalt, Ansbach, Kulmbach and Zweibrücken, plus the count of Öttingen. Against this a total of 31 temporal princes, almost all Protestants, were present or represented at the 1613 Reichstag, together with a further 38 counts and barons, as well as 58 ecclesiastical princes and prelates with worldly domains.²⁷ The picture is similar for the cities, where of the total of 58 represented only 17 belonged to the Protestant Union, and these were mostly small. The Protestant militants were so opposed to majority voting precisely because they were a small minority. Their significance thus lay not in their numbers or size, but in a lingering attachment to the consensual traditions of the Reichstag, together with the more practical need of the emperor to secure a tax grant after the failure of 1608.

Dissension at Reichstag meetings was nothing new, as it had been more the rule than the exception for most of a century since the Reformation. 1608 was indeed exceptional, but by comparison 1613 was a return to type rather than a further escalation. Thus in the latter year the 'corresponding princes', more than half of whom were Calvinists or Calvinist-inclined, obtained significantly less support from the conservative Lutheran Protestants than had been the case in 1608. As will be discussed below, the Palatinate had its own political and religious motives for placing itself at the centre of an anti-Catholic and anti-Habsburg group of irreconcilables, and for exploiting available

genuine issues for its own purposes, but while this undoubtedly made Reichstag meetings difficult it neither halted them nor, apart from in 1608, prevented them from granting taxes for defence against the Turks. As Schulze concludes, the continuing disputes 'should not give the false impression that the Protestant efforts for an equal organisation of the Imperial constitution led to a breakdown of all institutions'.²⁸

The free Imperial cities

As noted above, suspension of the Hofrat action against the Protestant council in Aachen had formed a part of the activists' demands at the Reichstag of 1613, but after the failure of the negotiations the case continued, leading to an Imperial ban on the city in 1614, which was enforced shortly thereafter by Spanish troops. While this certainly reflected continuing inter-confessional tension, it also needs to be put into a wider context.

Urban disturbances were a long-standing feature of the German political landscape, as was the involvement of the Kammergericht, the Hofrat, the emperor, and from time to time troops, in settling them. Friedrichs, a leading researcher in this field, sums it up:

German cities and towns experienced a turbulent political life in the two and a half centuries between the Reformation and the French Revolution. Many German towns of course escaped all political turmoil. But dozens of communities, including most of the largest cities in the Holy Roman Empire, were racked by episodes of bitter conflict, leading in some cases to the overthrow of existing regimes and the seizure of power, at least temporarily, by revolutionary opponents.²⁹

Schilling confirms this, particularly for the period between 1590 and the Thirty Years War:

German urban society was afflicted by serious internal tension. This was between the town councils and the oligarchies that dominated them, and the ordinary citizens who demanded their traditional privileges and greater participation in town government. . . . Consequently during the 1590s and the following decades in many towns the burghers rose up against the town councils. These politically and socially motivated uprisings . . . were usually led by well-to-do members of the upper class who had been excluded from power by the old oligarchies.³⁰

Friedrichs notes that 'many different situations could trigger an urban conflict: a religious dispute, a financial crisis, a power struggle with some outside authority', and often they may 'have been linked to the determination of an economically dynamic group to acquire political power consistent with its emerging economic status'.³¹ This latter point is particularly pertinent to Aachen, where the economically dynamic group initially excluded from political power comprised largely immigrant refugees from the Netherlands. That they were also predominantly Calvinist added the religious dimension which became the most noted feature of the dispute, both politically at the time and in later historiography, but economic and social factors were also at work.

Religious disputes were not necessarily inter-confessional. Thus when the council of the Protestant city of Schwäbisch Hall suspended the chief preacher in 1602 mass protests broke out, and the situation escalated until eventually a number of outside interventions were required to restore order. In other cases religion had little or nothing to do with the issue, as in two firmly Protestant cities where dissatisfied burghers confronted the council oligarchy. In the small free Imperial city of Wetzlar such a dispute developed between 1612 and 1614, leading both sides to look for outside help, and at one point the Landgrave of Hessen-Darmstadt occupied the city with a large force of soldiers, before imposing a settlement in his capacity as the appointed Imperial commissioner. Matters ended peaceably then, but the dissension continued for more than a hundred years afterwards.³²

One of the best-known disturbances was in the much larger and more important Protestant city of Frankfurt am Main, the Fettmilch uprising, also in 1612 to 1614. 'Here the issues that precipitated the uprising were strictly internal. The burghers accused the magistrates of keeping the city's privileges secret, of mismanaging the city's finances, and of favouring Jewish residents over Christian citizens.' Again an Imperial commission was appointed, and as the dissidents, by then in control, grew increasingly radical it was finally decided to bring in troops to crush the revolt, but before this could happen Fettmilch and the other leaders were arrested by a group of more moderate citizens, and they were eventually executed.³³

Such conflicts continued later in the century, not only in smaller places such as Erfurt but also in the major city of Cologne, in both of which the issues were likewise political with no significant religious aspects. The former case, which started in 1648, involved no less than four successive Imperial commissions, and was not finally resolved until 1664, when the archbishop of Mainz sent in troops and incorporated the

city into his own domains. The disturbances in Cologne, which had similarities with the Fettmilch uprising in Frankfurt, started in 1680 with a dispute between the council and citizen critics. This was followed by the unconstitutional deposition of the council in 1683, and by the eventual suppression of the new regime in 1685.³⁴

Viewed against this background, the case of Aachen, and for that matter Donauwörth, appear less like significant events in an escalation of inter-confessional tension leading towards war. Rather they fit into a much longer history of urban disturbances in which religion was only one of a number of potential rallying cries. Donauwörth was exceptional not because of the initial circumstances but as a result of the particularly inept handling of the situation by the ageing, unbalanced and politically threatened Emperor Rudolf II, which allowed the city to fall victim to the private territorial ambitions of Maximilian of Bavaria.

Calvinists, the Palatinate, and Christian of Anhalt

The Calvinists

Discussion of the years leading up to the Thirty Years War is often confused by the tendency of historians (including the present author) to refer for convenience to 'Catholics' and 'Protestants' in describing the opposing confessional groups. For some purposes this is adequate, but in other cases it is seriously misleading, implying that there were effectively only two parties, and that insofar as there were differences within them these were not generally significant. On the Catholic side this may suffice, because although there were disagreements these were tactical rather than doctrinal, reflecting attitudes ranging from the moderate to the militant. Among the Protestants, however, there were sharp divisions, particularly between the Lutherans and the Calvinists, and matters were even more complicated in Bohemia. At times the various Protestant denominations were forced together by pressure from the Catholics, particularly the growing Counter-Reformation, but at others they pursued fundamentally different courses, displaying a mutual antipathy which matched or even exceeded their hostility towards the Catholics. This was to have major consequences for the course of the Bohemian revolt, but it also had an important influence on the earlier events in Germany outlined in Chapter 1, so that it is appropriate to deviate here to look more closely at the Calvinists in particular.

The term 'Calvinist' is itself a piece of shorthand and something of a misnomer, as the German 'Calvinists' were not limited to direct followers of the doctrine and practices introduced by the French reformer John

Calvin in Geneva from 1537 onwards.³⁵ Indeed 'Calvinist' was initially an epithet applied to them by their religious opponents, Catholic and Lutheran alike. They usually referred to themselves as the 'Reformed' and to their faith as the 'Reformed religion', implying by that a second reformation taking further the process initiated by Luther in 1517, which in their view had not gone far enough. While Calvin was certainly an influence, the German Reformed tended to look nearer to home for their inspiration, which often stemmed from doctrines associated with Philipp Melanchthon, Luther's closest collaborator and effective successor.³⁶ Nevertheless the two had doctrinal differences, and some of Melanchthon's concepts tended in the same direction as Calvin's. Melanchthon's text for the Augsburg Confession also differed in some respects from Luther's position, a feature which subsequently enabled German Calvinists to claim adherence to it as a means of protecting their position in the Empire.

The exact nature of the theological differences were endlessly and bitterly disputed between Lutheran and Reformed clerics and academics throughout the remainder of the sixteenth and into the seventeenth centuries, but they need not concern us here, any more than they concerned ordinary people at the time. More significant for most were the differences in external practice, in which the Reformed resembled the English Puritans. The breaking of ordinary bread for the communion rather than the use of specially prepared wafers was perhaps the most obvious and symbolic, along with the use of wooden tables rather than stone altars and plain rather than consecrated water.³⁷ Like the Puritans too, the Reformed were inclined to iconoclasm, destroying pictures and statues to 'cleanses' the churches, an approach which caused particular offence when the Calvinist Palatines reached Prague during the Bohemian revolt.

The confessional division within the Protestant camp had important political implications, the first of which concerned the position of the Calvinists in respect of the benefits of the peace of Augsburg. This became a significant issue once a number of princes of the Empire adopted the Reformed religion, the first and most important of whom was the elector of the Palatinate. Oddly enough, the Palatinate had been one of the last major principalities to convert from Catholicism to Lutheranism, which it did only in 1546. However Elector Friedrich III was already well on the way towards a Reformed position by the time of his accession in 1559, a process which was completed in the next few years and consolidated by the adoption of the Heidelberg Catechism as the basis of the electorate's religion in 1563. The uncompromising

nature of this creed, encapsulated in its description of the Catholic Mass as 'accursed idolatry', alarmed many, not least Emperor Maximilian II, who saw it as a threat to his efforts to reduce religious tensions in the Empire.³⁸ Accordingly, and despite Elector Friedrich III's claim that he conformed to the Augsburg Confession, at the Reichstag of 1566 Maximilian moved to have the Palatinate formally excluded from the protection of the peace. For this he sought Lutheran support, which he duly received from a number of the Palatinate's political and religious opponents, notably the dukes of Württemberg and Pfalz-Zweibrücken. An open split in the Protestant ranks was avoided by the mediation of the elector of Saxony, and the proposal was dropped, but from that time onwards it was clear both to the Palatines and to other princes who converted to the Reformed religion that their position in the Empire was at risk, and moreover that they could not count on support from their Lutheran brethren.³⁹ As the Counter-Reformation developed, those of a Reformed or Calvinist persuasion were much more inclined than the Lutherans to see it as a concerted Habsburg-led Catholic onslaught aimed at nothing less than the complete eradication of Protestantism, in which they themselves would be the first targets. Hence they became the most militant advocates of Protestant self-defence and the leaders of the anti-Imperial and anti-Catholic political manoeuvres in the Empire in the decades before the Thirty Years War.

A further significant difference between the Protestant confessions concerned the attitude to authority. Following Luther's own teaching, mainstream Lutheranism prescribed a Christian duty of obedience to the established worldly authorities, notably princes. Conversely, although less formally incorporated into doctrine, Calvinist circles claimed that subjects had a natural right of resistance to an unjust prince. At a practical political level these contrasting approaches manifested themselves on the one hand in the view of many Lutheran princes, usually led by Saxony, that it was both incumbent upon them, and also expedient, to attempt to cooperate with the Catholic hierarchy, and particularly the emperor, in the interests of the common good. Calvinists, on the other hand, with the Palatinate usually in the forefront, were inclined to reject cooperation in favour of confrontation, both within the institutions of the Empire and if necessary outside them, including in the last resort by military means.

The 'Protestant' position at any given time and on any given issue in the Empire thus did not constitute a unified common stance, but reflected instead the current state of an unstable and shifting balance of influence between militants and moderates. The composition of the

core groups varied a little from time to time, but in general the militants centred around a small number of Calvinist principalities, while the more conservative Lutheran territories were usually to be found among the moderates. Sometimes there was an element of closing ranks to preserve an appearance of Protestant unity, but this hid rather than bridged often fierce differences of opinion, reflecting the equally fierce inter-confessional hostility between Calvinists and Lutherans.

The Palatinate

The Palatinate had been a dissenting voice in the Reichstag since the 1560s, but its position at the centre of the opposition in Imperial institutions did not stem exclusively from its Calvinist religious affiliation. It was also a principality struggling to reassert the status and political influence it had previously enjoyed. The Palatinate was traditionally the senior of the three secular electorates within the Empire, and it shared with Saxony the control over any interregnum between emperors. Since the Reformation, however, Saxony had in practice become the leading Protestant principality, with the Palatinate's relative decline in prestige accentuated by its adoption of the minority Reformed confession. During the fifteenth century the Palatinate had also had a wide sphere of influence in the western part of the Empire, where many of the smaller territories had looked to it for leadership and perhaps protection, while their counts had often taken positions in the elector's service. This regional system had declined following the Reformation, as the Palatinate remained Catholic while many of its clients became Protestant and broke away from its tutelage, a process which had only been partially reversed when a few later turned Calvinist, like the Palatinate itself. The fragmented nature of the core Palatine territories around the Rhine, from Heidelberg and Mannheim to Bacharach, had mattered less when the intermediate lands of the lesser nobility had been implicitly associated, but thereafter it was a considerable disadvantage. So too was the fact that a large part of the electorate's own territory, the Upper Palatinate, was detached and some 150 miles to the east of Heidelberg, and moreover it remained stubbornly Lutheran and rebelliously inclined.

The anti-Habsburg stance of the Palatinate also long preceded the advent of Calvinism, dating back to the Middle Ages, and dynastic rivalry was at its heart. The electors of the Palatinate, like their relatives the dukes of Bavaria, were Wittelsbachs, and in the fourteenth century the Bavarian line had provided an emperor, while at the beginning of the fifteenth a Palatine elector had been king of the Romans and

de facto emperor, although never formally crowned. The Imperial crown had been monopolised by the Habsburgs ever since, and moreover a Habsburg emperor had frustrated an attempt to unite the Wittelsbach territories, thus creating an entity to rival the Austrian lands, through a marriage between the heir to the Palatinate and the duke of Bavaria's daughter. This had led to the Landshut inheritance war of 1503 to 1505, in which the emperor backed the elector of the Palatinate's enemies, so that he was defeated, losing both territory and political influence as a result.⁴⁰ Even a century later this still rankled.

Calvinist militancy added a wider European perspective to Palatine policy, as they saw the wars in the Netherlands and against the Huguenots in France as part and proof of their concept of a Spanish and Habsburg-led drive to eliminate Protestantism. Both confessional solidarity and a view that it was better to confront the challenge abroad than to wait to be attacked at home dictated that they should offer support. This they did, providing financial assistance in the Netherlands and troops in France, the latter led in person by Elector Friedrich III's second son in two campaigns in the 1560s and 1570s, while a younger son fell in battle fighting for the Dutch against the Spanish. Though the military success of these interventions was decidedly modest they were nevertheless expensive, and as they were principally financed with borrowed money the debts soon mounted, limiting the scope for further direct Palatine involvement.

Instead the wish to create an outward-looking Protestant alliance with both German and foreign participation became a long-standing central objective of Palatine policy, although it met with little initial success. The other territories under Calvinist rule were mostly too small to contribute much, while the Lutherans did not share the fear of a Catholic crusade and were unwilling to be linked with Palatine activism. A brief exception occurred with the accession of a Calvinist-influenced elector in Saxony in 1586, leading to a joint Saxon–Palatine effort to build an implicitly anti-Habsburg, anti-Imperial association. Saxon involvement elicited wider Protestant support and first steps were taken at a meeting in 1591, but with the death of the elector of Saxony soon afterwards his territory reverted to moderate Lutheranism and the project collapsed. The sole result was the raising of a small joint army to assist the Huguenots in France in 1591 and 1592, a force which was commanded by the young Prince Christian of Anhalt.

For most of the 55 years from the adoption of the Calvinist Heidelberg Catechism in 1563 to the commencement of the Thirty Years War in 1618 the Palatinate was the extreme case among the Protestant

territories of the Empire. Religiously and politically militant, confrontational and with a European outlook, it stood in sharp contrast to the moderate, conformist and inward-looking Lutheran principalities typified by Saxony. Hence while it was often anathema to most of the latter, the Palatinate was highly attractive to many like-minded co-religionists, so that it received a significant inflow of able and well-educated men, some of them refugees from intolerance elsewhere, some of them keen to be at the forefront of Calvinist progress, and others simply ambitious. Many were successful in gaining posts as clerics, academics, lawyers or administrators, and in time some even graduated to the elector's council. This led to the strange situation that a significant proportion of the opinion-formers and influence-wielders were outsiders from other parts of Germany or beyond, with no personal commitment to the Palatinate, which was more a vehicle for pursuing their religious and political objectives and antagonisms than their homeland.⁴¹ Policy formation also became circular, in that the newcomers naturally supported the continuation of the religious and political stance which had attracted them to the Palatinate in the first place, and even tended towards greater extremism rather than moderation.

This situation was further exacerbated by the fact that the brief reign of Friedrich III's son Ludwig VI was followed from 1583 by two minorities and the subsequent accessions of two weak electors, Friedrich IV and Friedrich V, both of whom relied heavily on their advisors, and indeed were inclined to leave much of the direction of policy to them. These advisers, however, had experienced a short sharp shock under Ludwig VI, a Lutheran who had not followed his father in adopting the Reformed religion, and who had promptly sent the Calvinists packing. Their hold on effective power was only saved by his death after seven years, during which many of the officials had found employment in the minor principality of Friedrich III's second son Johann Casimir, a Calvinist who became regent of the Palatinate on his brother's death and brought them all back again. Even then they were not out of the wood, as two external Lutheran princes were nominated as co-regents, and Johann Casimir had to manoeuvre carefully before he could establish effective control.

Friedrich IV reached majority in 1592, but he was a heavy drinker, and ill health threatened an early death and another regency, possibly by a Lutheran. Efforts were made to avert this, and to ensure continuing Calvinist control of policy the electoral council was reconstructed around 1604 in order to remove dissenting voices. The Palatinate thus went into the critical years before the Thirty Years War with

a government comprised largely of religious militants, closing ranks against a potential Lutheran threat to their control internally, and committed to a continuation of the long-standing external policy of confrontation with the Catholic-dominated Imperial institutions and the Habsburg emperor. When Friedrich IV died in 1610 there was indeed a dispute over the regency, but the most entitled relative, a Lutheran, was forestalled by a *coup de main* by another, a Calvinist. The latter held the position until Friedrich V came of age in 1614, but well before then Christian of Anhalt had become the dominant influence on Palatine policy.

Christian of Anhalt

Christian was brought up as a Lutheran in his father's principality of Anhalt, which on the latter's death was divided between his several sons.⁴² Christian thus inherited a small territory centred on the town of his birth, becoming Prince Christian I of Anhalt-Bernburg, and throughout the remainder of his adventurous career he combined the continued rule of this little province with his other posts and activities. His considerable ability and good education were complemented by an easy, outgoing personality, and he had the gift of getting on well with almost everyone, including his political opponents. He was also extremely well connected, as a scion of an old and prestigious noble family, so that his relatives included the rulers of other important territories, particularly in north Germany, while his older sisters made good marriages, further extending those links.

Ability, rank and connections doubtless all played a part, but it was nonetheless a remarkable achievement when Christian, at the age of 23, was appointed to command the army raised by the short-lived German Protestant alliance to assist Henri IV and the French Huguenots in 1591. The campaign was not a spectacular one, but Christian nevertheless emerged with credit and a somewhat exaggerated reputation as a general, which was further enhanced by a short spell in 1592 as commander of the Protestant forces in the conflict between the claimants to the bishopric of Strasbourg. While in France he also struck up a friendship with Henri IV, and this may have been instrumental in his conversion to Calvinism at this time, although ironically Henri himself converted to Catholicism for political reasons soon afterwards. In 1594 the Calvinist connection led to Christian, still only 26, being offered the governorship of the Upper Palatinate, an office usually assigned to the heir or a younger brother of the elector, but one which Christian held for the next 25 years until he was displaced due to the failure of the Bohemian revolt.

He soon began to exercise a wider influence, not least on the young elector Friedrich IV, to whom his own princely rank gave him direct access, and this increased further when a number of his officials from the Upper Palatinate later obtained important posts in the Heidelberg government. The elector himself, and in due course his successor, also went for long stays in Amberg, the Upper Palatinate capital, thus consolidating personal relationships as the basis for direct recourse to Christian for advice.

Christian's contacts extended far beyond Amberg and Heidelberg. He travelled frequently, both on diplomatic missions for the Palatinate and on his own account, including regular visits to Rudolf II's court in nearby Prague as well as renewing his acquaintance with Henri IV of France. He was also an assiduous correspondent, so that Amberg became the centre of a network of links between like-minded protagonists of Protestant resistance to the developing Counter-Reformation, to which Christian brought a European rather than a purely German perspective. By 1606 he was in touch with opponents of the Habsburgs in their hereditary lands in Austria, and indeed with almost anyone who was or might be an enemy of the Habsburgs more widely, from restive nobility in Moravia and Silesia to contacts in Savoy and Venice.

Christian was closely involved in the formation of the Protestant Union in 1608, and he was nominated both as the elector of the Palatinate's deputy as director of the Union and as prospective second-in-command of its forces in the event of active hostilities. His opponents were in no doubt about his aims, and at the foundation of the Catholic League a year later he was openly branded as a warmonger. He was certainly an active protagonist of Union military intervention in the escalating confrontation surrounding the Cleves-Jülich inheritance dispute in 1609, when as well as visiting Henri IV of France to encourage him to participate he himself took command of Union troops on the Rhine.

After Henri's assassination Christian continued trying to build a wider anti-Habsburg front by personal diplomacy, and although the endeavour was fatally weakened by France's withdrawal from European politics his efforts contributed to the establishment of defensive alliances for the Union with the Dutch in 1612 and the English in 1613, the latter underpinned by the marriage of the sixteen-year-old Elector Friedrich V to Elizabeth Stuart, the daughter of James I. When Friedrich came of age and took over personal rule Christian became the most influential of his advisers, and his determined advocacy contributed significantly to Friedrich's decision to accept the Bohemian crown, thereby involving

the Palatinate in the revolt and arguably causing its escalation from a localised issue into the start of a disastrous general war.

Nevertheless it seems likely that historians have overestimated Christian's wider significance, registering his tireless efforts to orchestrate anti-Habsburg activity across Europe, including in Bohemia before the revolt, without fully evaluating what actual influence or effect he had. Outside the Palatinate Christian's successes were mainly limited to encouraging people to do things which they were inclined to do anyway, whereas most of his more ambitious schemes achieved little. His biographer summed it up: 'Christian was a theoretician whose political plans deviated from the possible. His diplomatic efforts often failed due to flawed assessments of the other parties, and to insufficient awareness of their motives and premises.'⁴³

League and Union

In December 1607 Donauwörth was seized by Maximilian of Bavaria, acting in his capacity as the commissioner appointed to enforce the Imperial ban on the city. A few months later Protestant militants brought the Reichstag to a halt, walking out in protest to back up their complaints, prominent among them Donauwörth and the legal proceedings in the 'four cloisters' cases. The Protestant Union was formed in May 1608 as an immediate reaction, and the Catholic League was founded in July 1609, apparently in reply, although in fact discussions had already been going on for several years.⁴⁴ By mid-1610 Union forces were involved in the conflict around Jülich, and by the autumn of that year a League army had been raised to oppose them. Although that crisis was defused, a pattern of escalation and confrontation had been established, which, it is said, paved the way to the Thirty Years War. To investigate how valid this is we must look in more depth at the history of both alliances.

There had been a number of previous associations of princes or territories, mainly localised, and these were tolerated in the Empire provided that they were purely defensive in character. The definitive ruling was given in the Golden Bull of 1356, which prohibited such associations in general but made an exception for those specifically and solely intended for the maintenance of peace in their regions, although even here the emperor reserved the right of approval or disapproval. The League had a predecessor in the Landsberg League of 1556, the principal members of which were the duke of Bavaria, the archbishop of Salzburg and the archduke of Austria, although the Protestant cities of Augsburg and

Nuremberg were also members for a time. It met with only limited success even in its earlier years, becoming increasingly inactive thereafter until it was finally disbanded in 1599. The Union likewise had a form of antecedent in the short-lived cooperation between the electors of the Palatinate and Saxony between 1586 and 1592, while the Protestant territories of Württemberg, Baden-Durlach and Pfalz-Neuburg had formed a defensive alliance in 1605.

The Catholic League

Neuer-Landfried, the historian of the early years of the Catholic League, confirms that the idea of a wider Catholic defence body had been discussed well before the Donauwörth incident, triggered by the controversy over the 'four cloisters' cases and its repercussions at the Reichstag meeting of 1603. Shortly afterwards the three ecclesiastical electors met and concluded that because of the political situation and the perceived designs of the Protestants on further church property it would be advisable to assemble a defensive army of 20,000 men and the funds to maintain it. However Emperor Rudolf II expressed serious reservations, and following the death of the elector of Mainz early in 1604 the matter was dropped.⁴⁵

Maximilian of Bavaria returned to the concept as the Donauwörth incident developed, not least because he did not wish his duchy to stand alone as the principal target of Protestant hostility. Thus, says Albrecht, 'the League was not only founded principally by Bavaria, but also for Bavaria, and in furtherance of Bavaria's confessional and political objectives'.⁴⁶ Following the Reichstag of 1608 Maximilian energetically sought to win adherents for a Catholic League, mainly in southern Germany, but progress was slow even after the foundation of the Protestant Union. Although most of those approached expressed agreement with the principle they raised a series of problems which betrayed underlying reservations or reluctance to become involved. The influential bishop of Würzburg warned that an association limited to Catholics was likely to draw its participants into a major political conflict in the Empire, particularly if the members of the emperor's house were excluded, while the financial burden would be too great for the Catholic princes alone. The new elector of Mainz commended Maximilian's efforts, but preferred to see how much success he had with other prelates before committing himself, as it would be easier for him to join an organisation once established by Bavaria than to participate in its founding. The elector of Trier was similarly equivocal, while the archbishop of Salzburg, noting that the Landsberg League had been

a failure, preferred an association limited to ecclesiastical members, as this would arouse less suspicion among the Protestants and could also be kept secret more easily. In June 1608 Maximilian complained to his uncle, the elector of Cologne, that there was little enthusiasm for his proposed confederation.⁴⁷

Nevertheless he persevered, but it took him a further year to assemble enough support to found the League. One major problem was his objection to the participation of Habsburg Austria, which he attributed to a wish to avoid involvement in the then current feud between Emperor Rudolf II and his brother Matthias, although privately his principal reasons were the long-established dynastic rivalry between the Wittelsbachs and the Habsburgs, together with his own aim to take the leading position as both political and prospective military head of the organisation. The bishops, on the other hand, wanted Habsburg membership, or at least the emperor's approval, and certainly his knowledge of the founding of the association. Agreement was eventually reached in Munich in July 1609, but the initial membership was small, Bavaria being joined only by the four nearby bishoprics of Würzburg, Constance, Augsburg and Passau, together with two minor ecclesiastical foundations, also in southern Germany. The archbishop of Salzburg declined membership at least in part because of his local rivalry with Bavaria, but the three ecclesiastical electors of Mainz, Cologne and Trier joined shortly afterwards. The alliance had various titles during its existence, all stressing its defensive rather than its confessional character, whereas the name 'Catholic League' was originally coined by its opponents as an allusion to a notorious organisation active during the French Wars of Religion, but the label has nevertheless been adopted by historiography.⁴⁸

A number of new members joined in 1610, but thereafter recruitment was slow and spread over the following three years. The eventual participants included the city of Cologne (although researchers differ about this) and the small Catholic cities and minor counts of the Swabian Circle, but the remainder were almost all ecclesiastical entities from southern Germany. Bavaria was the only significant non-ecclesiastical territory, and the only members in the northern half of Germany were the electorate and possibly the city of Cologne, and the bishoprics of Hildesheim, Liège and Münster, although these only joined in 1613 after their bishop, Maximilian's brother, also became elector of Cologne following the death of his uncle. Even in southern Germany by no means all the potential Catholic members actually joined.⁴⁹

From the outset the League was affected by 'the severe internal tension' arising from 'the disparity between the elector of Mainz's emphasis on the interests of the Empire and support for the emperor on the one hand, and Maximilian's assertively confessional policy on the other'.⁵⁰ Thus at the first full meeting in February 1610 Mainz insisted that approaches should be made to prospective Protestant members, particularly Saxony and Hessen-Darmstadt. Saxony responded positively, perhaps because the elector was looking for support for his claim to the Jülich inheritance, and at the beginning of 1611 he made a move for membership. This did not meet with Maximilian's approval, but as it was widely supported by other members, including the ecclesiastical electors, he had to give way, and the Saxon elector was invited to the next League meeting. In the event, however, he came under Lutheran pressure not to attend, and his application lapsed.⁵¹

In the meantime the developing conflict over Cleves-Jülich, the participation of the Union, and the potential threat to the Rhine electorates put pressure on the League to respond. This provoked an early display of the internal differences, with Maximilian initially being strongly opposed to any involvement, which he saw as the League being used in Habsburg interests, whereas the ecclesiastical electors regarded it as a matter of their own security, even arguing that this contingency was one of their principal reasons for joining in the first place.⁵² In any event it was felt that nothing could be done without outside financial support, leading to a long diplomatic effort to secure this from the pope and from Spain. The former was unforthcoming, while the Spanish sought to coerce Maximilian into not only accepting Habsburg participation in the League, but also into sharing its direction with Archduke Leopold and his brother Ferdinand, in response to which he instead resigned his own position in May 1610. Eventually matters were patched up, and with the promise of Spanish subsidies Maximilian resumed his post, so that by the autumn of 1610 it was possible for the League to raise an army with a nominal strength of 15,000 infantry and 4000 cavalry, building on a core force which Maximilian had already recruited on his own behalf.⁵³ By then, though, the conflict was almost over, and the Union, divided internally and in severe financial difficulties, proposed a settlement. This was agreed in late October 1610, although the League decided to retain 15,000 men for three months as a precaution, and it was left with a large debt, principally to Maximilian, who had financed much of the recruitment.

This one warlike venture, albeit without action, had been a modest success, but thereafter the internal tensions resurfaced. Although

Maximilian was overall military commander, the League had been organised from the outset into two directorates, one for south Germany under Maximilian and the other for the Rhine region with the elector of Mainz as director, and the two had worked independently on their different and sometimes conflicting plans. Matters came to a head at a meeting in March 1613, at which Mainz again raised the question of attempting to recruit Saxony and made other proposals which would have introduced Habsburg influence and reduced Maximilian's own standing and control. Added to this was the failure of members to pay the contributions previously due, so that much of Maximilian's expenditure in 1610 had not been refunded, and moreover they agreed to less than half of his proposal for a new levy. Hence he again gave notice of resignation of his leading position in the League.

The accession of Emperor Matthias and the more conciliatory policy of Cardinal Khlesl favoured Mainz's approach of seeking to broaden the League and to align it more closely with the emperor. Hence at a further general meeting in October 1613 changes were agreed which amounted to a reconstitution of the League into a more political and less confessional association, with names and terminology carefully chosen to leave open the possibility of Protestants joining. It was also to be reorganised into three rather than two directorates, with action in the event of a crisis to be decided by majority vote of the directorates rather than being left to Maximilian as sole head. The third directorate was to be Austrian, but as this included the detached Habsburg territories in south-west Germany the neighbouring members were given a choice of which directorate to join, the result of which left Bavaria with only a small number of its traditional local adherents. Moreover the Austrian director was to be Archduke Maximilian, a Habsburg and the emperor's brother, even though he himself had not yet decided to join the League.

This meeting in October 1613 was effectively the end of the League (although it was re-established in 1619 as a consequence of the Bohemian revolt). In January 1614 Maximilian also resigned as director of the Bavarian division, complaining that under the influence of Khlesl and Archduke Maximilian the Catholic interest would always take second place to considerations of Imperial politics.⁵⁴ Instead he convened a meeting of his supporters, and in March 1614 they formed a new Bavarian association with substantially the same constitution and membership as at the original foundation of the League in 1609. Efforts were later made to re-integrate this with the remainder of the League, but they dragged on for almost two years, a period largely taken up with disputes about money and membership.

Duke Maximilian, for his part, demanded that those who had opted for the Austrian division should first pay the arrears of their contributions towards the debt due to Bavaria since 1610, whereas the members concerned were unwilling or unable to pay at all. Archduke Maximilian in turn demanded that the rich bishopric of Augsburg and the abbey of Ellwangen should be transferred to the Austrian division, making this a precondition of taking up his own membership and the directorship. This would have left the Bavarian division unworkably small, while the bishop and abbot concerned were unwilling to transfer, so a stalemate developed and the Austrian division was never formed. The elector of Mainz still had ideas of involving Saxony, but this was now opposed by the new elector of Cologne, Maximilian's brother. Disagreements also arose over proposals to organise the Rhine directorate into two sub-divisions, although they did get as far as nominating a general, another move aimed at reducing Maximilian's influence. Eventually in December 1615 Maximilian resigned as director even of his own reconstituted Bavarian division, effectively dissolving it, while complaining that his involvement with the League had brought him nothing but hate, enmity and accusations that he was pursuing not the preservation of the Catholic religion and the emperor's authority, but his own interests.⁵⁵

Khlesl had long seen the confessional alliances as an obstacle to his policy of seeking some form of accommodation in the Empire, so that the virtual demise of the League provided him with an opportunity. Accordingly the emperor wrote to the elector of Mainz in April 1617 referring to his powers under the Golden Bull and requiring the dissolution of the League, although in practice it simply lapsed thereafter. Albrecht concludes that this history 'shows that only certain of the ecclesiastical territories could be persuaded, and those only with difficulty, to contribute sufficiently to the League to make it viable'.⁵⁶

The Protestant Union

The history of the Protestant Union exhibits many parallels to that of the League. Although founded in the aftermath of the failed Reichstag meeting of 1608 it too had been under discussion previously, and indeed the Palatinate had been attempting to rally support for such an organisation for decades. Others had been wary, but earlier in 1608 the rulers of Baden, Pfalz-Neuburg and Württemberg had debated the possibility of extending their defensive alliance to form a specifically Lutheran union, either independently or to give their confession due weight within a wider Protestant body.⁵⁷ This illustrates from the outset one of

the Union's principal problems, that it was a marriage of convenience between groups with differing outlooks and objectives. The Palatinate and its Calvinist allies saw it as both a means of defence and of potential counter-attack in a Europe-wide struggle against what they perceived as a Habsburg-led Catholic campaign to eradicate Protestantism. The Lutheran member princes, on the other hand, albeit with differing degrees of emphasis, viewed it strictly in terms of the Empire and of self-defence, particularly against any Catholic attempt at forcible recovery of secularised church property.⁵⁸ Thus, says a modern study, 'Calvinist internationalism and activism were juxtaposed to Lutheran regionalism and legalism, a fundamental contradiction which shaped the history of the Union from the outset'.⁵⁹ Meanwhile the cities, anxious not to become the next Donauwörth, were principally concerned with the protection of their own independence and commercial freedoms against the ambitions of powerful Catholic neighbours.

This basic divergence of interests warns against the common historiographic oversimplification of discussing the Union and the League as though they were homogeneous bodies with single definable aims and intentions. On the contrary, Gotthard's study of Württemberg shows that this assumption cannot validly be applied even to individual members, as there were strongly differing and shifting opinions among the duke's leading councillors. Württemberg was probably the most cautious of the leading members, attempting at crucial points to apply the brake to the Palatinate's impetuous approach. The cities too were anxious not to be drawn into risky ventures, and from 1610 onwards they regularly sought to control and limit the Palatine leadership and the princes in general. Religious hostility exacerbated these internal tensions. Thus in 1608 a Pfalz-Neuburg prince pointedly doubted whether the margraves of Ansbach and Kulmbach could be considered genuine Lutherans, while the Württemberg theologians in Tübingen were as hostile to Calvinism as those in Dresden. In 1617 one of the councillors advised the duke that an alliance with the Calvinists could obviously not enjoy God's blessing, while another stated unequivocally that as much danger threatened from the Calvinists as from the Catholics, echoing his colleague in adding that an association with them was an affront to God's honour.⁶⁰

Self-interest and political rivalries were further divisive factors and obstacles to recruiting. Thus when Hessen-Kassel joined it was inevitable that the rival Hessen-Darmstadt branch of the family would not.⁶¹ The Lutheran prince of Pfalz-Neuburg was a founder member of the Union, but he was also the senior relative of Friedrich IV of the Palatinate,

and when the latter died in 1610 Neuburg expected to be appointed as regent for the under-age heir. He was forestalled by a coup staged by his Calvinist nephew, the prince of Pfalz-Zweibrücken, and worse still, acting in his capacity as regent, Zweibrücken also took over the Palatine directorate of the Union, so that in protest Neuburg took no further active part in the alliance. When his son converted to Catholicism in pursuance of his Cleves-Jülich claim in 1614, and then inherited Neuburg three months later, the membership effectively terminated. Brandenburg's particular self-interest was apparent when it belatedly joined the Union in 1610, during the first phase of the Cleves-Jülich dispute, and its membership then and later centred on hopes for Union support for the elector's claim. When this fell short of its expectations Brandenburg stopped paying its contributions and played little further part in Union affairs, although as late as 1615 it was continuing to link any payment against its arrears to support in Cleves-Jülich. The debts were still outstanding in 1617, when the Brandenburg representative to the Union protested to his masters: 'No-one believes me any more. The princes just laugh at me, while the delegates from the cities shuffle their feet derisively when I make the same promise [about payment] yet again.'⁶² In the end Brandenburg paid nothing, and its membership lapsed in 1617.

One other crucial division was that between the princes and the cities, as the former sought to determine the Union's actions in accordance with their own policies and interests while requiring the latter to foot most of the bill. The procedural rules even stipulated that irrespective of the actual balance of membership the princes would always have two more votes than the cities. Often they took no vote at all, as in the case of the alliance with France in 1610, which was signed by representatives of the princes alone, while the cities were left to complain that they had never paid so much in taxes to any emperor as to the Union in this one year.⁶³ Their dissatisfaction was increased by the disproportionate share of the financial burden which they bore, whereas a number of the princes were already well in arrears with their payments.

Wilson notes that 'confessional issues had to be pushed to the fore to rally support for the Protestant Union. Only through fostering a climate of fear and suspicion were the Palatinate's leaders able to convince some of their co-religionists to join the alliance.'⁶⁴ For a while this had some success, but 1610 was the high-water mark for the Union, as the Cleves-Jülich conflict brought in its last new members and the agreement with Henri IV briefly seemed to give it real significance. On the

other hand two bungled and ineffective forays into Alsace in an attempt to dislodge forces being mustered there by Archduke Leopold were military and political setbacks, and they were not compensated for by the minor part played by the Union in the recapture of Jülich after Henri's assassination. Internally divided, indebted, and outnumbered by the League army eventually assembled by Maximilian of Bavaria, the Union had little choice but to back down soon afterwards.

The 1610 fiasco accentuated the divisions. The action over Cleves-Jülich had been contrary to the Union's founding constitution, which specifically prohibited involvement in private disputes, as well as making Union support conditional upon a prior attack on a member. The Palatine leadership had ignored this and by-passed potential opposition. As a known moderate, Württemberg was only informed of the second incursion into Alsace once it was under way, while the cities were neither consulted nor informed, a fact which influenced their determination to resist further entanglements in subsequent years.⁶⁵

Although mutual assistance alliances were later signed with England and the Dutch, these were of limited benefit without French support, while attempts to recruit new members, particularly in northern Germany, were completely unsuccessful. With Brandenburg and Neuburg no longer participating the princely membership reduced only to the Palatinate, Hessen-Kassel and four minor territories, all of which were Calvinist or Calvinist inclined, together with the Lutheran principalities of Baden-Durlach and Württemberg. Matters came to a head when the question of extending the alliance beyond its original ten-year term arose. At a preliminary meeting of the princes Württemberg expressed reservations, reflecting the strong opposition to renewal which had emerged when the matter was discussed by the duke's council. There the cost of contributions to 'this ruinous alliance' had been contrasted with its failure to extract concessions from its opponents or to produce any specific benefits for Württemberg itself, while it was argued that the duchy's seventy or more secularised church properties would be better protected by moving to a position of neutrality rather than continuing to be identified with a military union.⁶⁶ Nevertheless at the princes' meeting the Calvinist majority supported a Palatine proposal for a further ten-year agreement. At their own advance gathering the cities took a harder line, and they maintained this when the full Union met in April 1617. Hence they limited the extension to three years, as well as imposing conditions prohibiting military actions without the advance consent of all Union members, and banning separate meetings of the princes in the future. This was, says Gotthard, 'a result

which can best be described as a dissolution decision cushioned by a temporary stay of execution'.⁶⁷

Some specific figures may help to offset the impression that in the years immediately prior to the Thirty Years War the Empire was an armed camp divided into two rival alliances, the League and the Union. In fact, of the 185 estates represented at the 1613 Reichstag meeting well over half were members of neither. Moreover the same is true of each of three principal sub-groups, the princes (comprising the electors, prince-bishops and territorial princes), the lords (that is the lower prelates, counts and barons), and the cities. Even among the ecclesiastical princes and prelates more than half were not members of the League, and more than half of the Protestant princes were not members of the Union. Moreover the proportion of non-members was actually higher than this, as although almost all the alliance members were represented at the Reichstag meeting a considerable number of non-members were not, among them some two dozen free cities, including Hamburg and Bremen, as well as the substantial secularised bishoprics of Magdeburg, Halberstadt and others. These figures need to be viewed cautiously, as the number of estates does not necessarily correspond to their size or importance, but the list does confirm that there were significant numbers of major territories as well as many minor ones among both the members and the non-members. The detail behind the figures also confirms that both the League and the Union were essentially south German organisations, as the League had only a few members north of Frankfurt am Main, while discounting Brandenburg the Union had none.⁶⁸

The state of Germany in 1617

According to the traditional interpretation, Germany in 1617 was in a state of crisis. Inter-confessional tension had escalated through a long series of conflicts and confrontations, key Imperial institutions had broken down, and the Empire was divided into two hostile military alliances. Wilson sums it up: 'Germany in the years after 1609 is almost uniformly presented as on a "knife-edge" waiting for the "spark" that would transform "a cold war into a hot one"'.⁶⁹ This view, which is still widespread, underlies most general studies of the Thirty Years War, and it is implicit in conventional presentations of the events of the preceding decades even though the author may include a caveat qualifying this interpretation. It is, however, increasingly being challenged by modern research, both in detail and as an overall concept, leading Wilson to conclude that 'serious problems persisted, but there were clear

signs that tension was abating by 1618', and 'there was no inexorable slide towards war'. Schmidt likewise denies 'the inevitability of the outbreak of war in 1618', and observes that 'the historiographic construct of an almost unavoidable war appears anything but compelling'.⁷⁰ The respected German historian Johannes Burkhardt confirms these views of the state of the Empire in 1617:

None of the well-known earlier religious and political confrontations had actually led to war. The most recent perception is that the potential for confessional conflict was declining again, and that the Empire had entered into a peace process and commenced promising settlement negotiations.⁷¹

The chronological approach adopted in Chapter 1 draws attention first of all to the long period over which the events usually cited actually occurred. The administrator of Magdeburg was denied his seat in the Reichstag in 1582, the same year in which the archbishop of Cologne turned Protestant and precipitated the Bishops' War. By 1617 these disputes were history, 35 years in the past, which in those days was most of an adult lifetime, while even the seizure of Donauwörth was already a decade ago. The chronology also shows that the incidents were spread relatively evenly across the 35 years, whereas to reach a critical situation conflicts tend to become progressively more frequent and more severe. Crises are intrinsically unstable, that is they either escalate or cool off but they cannot long maintain a steady state, so that the history of this period suggests a more or less regular cycle of increased tension caused by a particular incident, followed by some years in which little more happened and the stresses declined.

One telling indicator is that polarisation was likewise not progressive, but quickly reached a limit. The Union and the League recruited all the members who were going to join within a couple of years, peaking around 1611 and thereafter making no progress. The same applies to the militant Calvinist group and their few Lutheran allies, as the remaining core members of the Union in 1617 were essentially the 'corresponding princes' of 1594, and while some of the waverers around them had been replaced by others the group as a whole was no stronger than it had been at the outset. The life cycle of the two alliances is a further indicator. Defensive associations are usually at their strongest when there is a clear current threat, but if the perceived danger declines so does the cohesion, as internal differences resurface and concerns over cost start to outweigh anxieties over security. This is the

history of the League and the Union, from foundation in 1608 and 1609, through confrontation in 1610, to decline by 1613 and virtual dissolution in 1617.

There were of course very real problems and tensions, both confessional and political, in the Empire in 1617, but neither the courts nor the Reichstag were paralysed, significantly less than half of the estates of Germany, and very few north of Frankfurt, had joined the alliances, and those alliances were themselves in terminal decline. There were still some militants on both sides, but they were more isolated than before, with the majority of members and former members of the Union and League focused strictly on defence. The events of 1610 had also provided all concerned with a sharp reminder of the enormous costs of military ventures, including those of short duration or where the army did not actually take the field, and many of the debts incurred were still outstanding.⁷² Even the militants recognised that nothing of the kind could be undertaken again without substantial outside support, both financial and probably also military. The theory of a progressive escalation towards a flashpoint in 1618 is thus clearly unsustainable, and moreover there is some evidence of tentative progress towards an accommodation in the immediately preceding years.

One relevant factor was the death of Emperor Rudolf II in January 1612. While he was not himself responsible for the problems, most of the traditional list of conflicts occurred during his reign and some of them were aggravated by his approach. This started at his first Reichstag meeting in 1582, where his abandonment of the accommodative approach of his father Maximilian II caused the exclusion of the administrator of Magdeburg, and thereby the subsequent problem with the Visitation Commission and the Kammergericht appeals system. By the early 1600s Rudolf was decidedly eccentric and under extreme pressure from his family, particularly in the dispute with his brother Matthias, which was moving towards a crisis just as the Donauwörth incident escalated in 1607. Hence it has been argued that Rudolf's hard line was intended to improve his own standing with the Catholic party and to elicit support from Maximilian of Bavaria. He was under even greater family pressure and fighting to hold on to his crown when the duke of Jülich died in 1609, so that his provisional endorsement of the claim of the elector of Saxony may likewise reflect his search for personal support, while allowing or encouraging Archduke Leopold to intervene was a major misjudgement both of the situation and of the man. Hence Rudolf's demise removed one divisive and unpredictable factor from the political equation.

Matthias was no paragon, but he was inclined to leave matters to Khlesl, under whose influence Imperial policy turned towards a search for compromise. The negotiations at the Reichstag of 1613 were ultimately unsuccessful, but at least the parties were talking, which was a significant advance on 1608. Khlesl also advocated the issue of an Imperial *Lehnsindult* to allow representation for Magdeburg, and hence implicitly for other secularised bishoprics, and although this was not implemented due to Catholic resistance the proposition itself represented movement.⁷³ This, like the offer of a confessionally balanced meeting of the Deputation and the half-offer, albeit with strings, of the restitution of Donauwörth would scarcely have been forthcoming under Rudolf. Opposition remained, but the change in the Imperial position, given time, might have shifted the dividing lines.

One argument sometimes put forward for the traditional view of escalation towards conflict in 1618 is that contemporaries themselves believed that war was looming. Thus Parker notes that by about 1615 'there was a widespread conviction, both inside the territories of the Holy Roman Empire and beyond, that another major war in Europe was imminent'.⁷⁴ To set against this, however, in April 1615 the Brandenburg chancellor reported to his elector on a visit to Heidelberg, the capital city of the militant Calvinist Palatinate: 'As far as ideas of war are concerned, we found no-one there that way inclined. On the contrary from the highest to the lowest they are much more interested in peace and tranquillity.'⁷⁵ Nevertheless, continues Parker, 'by the summer of 1617 war certainly seemed to be in the air'. In one respect this is clearly true, in that it was well known that the truce between the Spanish and the Dutch was due to expire in 1621, and that although it had held relatively well, indeed surprisingly well, little or no progress towards any form of settlement had been made. That situation became even clearer in the autumn of 1618, when both Lerma in Spain and Oldenbarnevelt in the Dutch Republic lost office as a result of the defeat of the respective peace parties. This was obviously a matter of concern for neighbouring territories, particularly in the Rhineland, where there had been military incursions by both sides in the past. On the other hand, although some people undoubtedly had fears that a major European war would result, there was no clear foundation for this. The war in the Netherlands had, after all, already been going on for some forty years before the truce without becoming a general conflict or directly involving the Empire.

Fears of war in the Empire itself developed quickly once the revolt in Bohemia became a military conflict involving outside forces, but before 1618 such anxieties as there were may well have derived largely from

the new print journalism, as Schmidt notes: 'The media, which lived from sensationalism in their flysheets and pamphlets, gave this tried and trusted pattern a confessional slant, as it obviously boosted sales. . . . The emphasis on confessional antagonisms in radical broadsheets sharpened the crisis in the Imperial constitution.'⁷⁶ Lurid flysheets may well have influenced opinion and created apprehension, but this is not proof of a genuinely critical situation. People have feared war at many times and in many places, and sometimes it has followed, but at others it has not. For example during the 1960s many people were uneasy about the possibility of nuclear war, some were seriously anxious, and a few were convinced that it was inevitable, but it did not happen.

Far from being a powder keg awaiting a spark in 1617, the Empire itself, or more specifically Germany, was probably no nearer war than it had been for much of the time since 1555, and by no means as near as it had been in 1610. The evidence for this is further supported by the conduct of the principal parties as the crisis in Bohemia developed. There was no immediate rush to arms, and although both the Union and the reactivated League recruited forces in 1619 and 1620 the result in Germany was a stand-off rather than a war, which only developed several years later, and as a result of largely external developments rather than of a pre-existing internal situation.

Internationalist views

Many historians, particularly those writing broader studies, have sought to fit the Thirty Years War into one or more structural frameworks, notably the internationalist view, the state-building concept, the 'general crisis of the seventeenth century', Marxist interpretations, 'confessionalisation' and religious war. Wilson has capably analysed these and indicated some of their shortcomings, so that a comparable critique will not be attempted here.⁷⁷ The internationalist view requires more comment, however, as it parallels the standard approach already discussed in postulating a war which was almost inevitable. As noted earlier, British and American historians tend to stress the international context rather more than their German colleagues, often quite validly, but the limitations of the argument are clearly exposed by a few who make it the centre point, particularly when looking for the origins of the war. Thus Sutherland states:

The original standard version of the Thirty Years War was of a German-centred, predominantly religious conflict, albeit

containing other elements . . . C.V. Wedgwood, writing in 1938, initiated an important change by moving towards a more European conception. Displacing religion as the basic issue, she identified the Franco-Habsburg enmity as the most important factor in the structure of European politics, and there is no doubt that she was right.⁷⁸

Sutherland herself goes further, however, following Steinberg by describing the Thirty Years War as 'a largely factitious conception which has nevertheless become an indestructible myth'. Instead she regards the war as only a part of 'phase three' of a struggle between Spain and France which extended over more than two hundred years, from the beginning of the Italian wars in 1494 to the end of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1714. Hence she observes critically: 'No historian of the Thirty Years War has paid systematic attention to its origins. Most have contented themselves with taking the Imperial civil war as the real starting point. This approach confines the search for origins to the causes of that particular conflict.' Consistent with her long-term approach, she contends: 'Both the Austro-German and the wider European origins of the seventeenth-century wars date from the reign of Emperor Maximilian I, and more particularly from the Reformation and the election of Charles V, king of Spain, to the Imperial throne in 1519.'⁷⁹ Nevertheless she does also review the more proximate origins of the Thirty Years War of 1618 to 1648, albeit briefly and largely in line with the conventional interpretation.

In an earlier article the distinguished British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper also addressed the origins of the war, which he unhesitatingly placed in Spain:

The Thirty Years War is generally thought of as a German war; it was indeed fought out in Germany; but it was the Spanish Habsburgs who dominated their cousins in Vienna and Prague, and it was the Spanish renewal of the war against the Netherlands in 1621 which turned the German war, which might have been local and brief, into a long, general, European war.⁸⁰

He does not, however, explain how the German war might have been local and brief, nor how or why the war in the Netherlands, once renewed, supposedly became a general war when it had not done so in the forty years before the truce. Instead, and maintaining that the Thirty Years War 'was not created by the Bohemian and German incidents which officially began it', he concentrates upon the reasons why Spain

decided not to continue the truce with the Dutch, which he attributes principally to the newly powerful men in the Spanish government following the death of Philip III in 1621, and their conviction that 'Spain was losing the peace'.⁸¹

Hence there are two contrasting views. Trevor-Roper barely mentions France, seeing Spain and the Netherlands as the central issue, whereas for Sutherland Franco-Spanish hostility is the key factor, and she specifically notes that in 1621 'these old struggles' in the Netherlands, north Italy and within France itself 'resumed *alongside* the German war' (her emphasis).⁸² A third writer on the origins of the war, Gutmann, considers both these wider conflicts to be significant, but relegates the problems before 1618 in the Habsburg lands and Germany respectively to one paragraph each, while he classifies the revolt in Bohemia as 'a domestic problem'.⁸³ All three give precedence to European issues in the origins of the Thirty Years War, while implicitly or explicitly playing down the significance of events and tensions in the Empire itself. Parker too sees the war as deriving principally from the Spanish–Dutch struggle, and although he generally provides a more balanced view he nevertheless concludes that 'the events of 1618 in Bohemia merely anticipated that general conflict, bringing together the incipient but separate crises which had already polarised opinion in the Empire and in the Habsburg heartland'.⁸⁴

The problem with these and other internationalist approaches, as well as with some more German-oriented analyses, is that they describe broad historical situations in which a war *could* occur, rather than examining the specific reasons why this one *did* occur, and more particularly why it occurred when and where it did. The Cold War after 1945 is again a good parallel. Had it developed into an open war, historians would have been able to find ample origins in the preceding circumstances and events. But it did not. In 1618 the conflicts both internationally and within Germany were not so very different from what they had been for much of the previous forty years. The war in the Netherlands started in 1568. Spanish interference in the French Wars of Religion went on for decades before the open war of 1595 to 1598. The series of confrontations in Germany dates from 1582 or earlier. Of course it is possible to provide reasons why these circumstances did not coalesce into a general war at earlier points, but this makes it all the more necessary to explain what was different in 1618.

A further difficulty with the internationalist emphasis is that it is more relevant to the development of the Thirty Years War than to its origins, although even here it tends to overlook the fact that the war was not a

single cohesive event. There were several stages, each bringing in different participants in circumstances which varied from those at the outset, and which were as much consequences of the preceding stage or stages as of wider and longer-term conflicts. Thus although Franco-Spanish hostility was certainly a major factor in the latter years of the war France was not involved at all at the outset, and only marginally or vicariously for a good many years afterwards. Likewise the most notable thing about the war in the Netherlands in this context is that the Bohemian war did not cause its resumption, as the parties adhered to their original truce, which lasted until 1621, by which time the Bohemians had been defeated and the Palatinate had been partially occupied by Spanish troops. There is an element of truth in Trevor-Roper's implication that the 'German war' might have been settled at this point, but the reasons it was not were principally Emperor Ferdinand II's political and financial debts to Maximilian of Bavaria, together with the princely pride and intransigence of the principals, all of which, like the continuation of the fighting in the Empire after 1621, had little to do with the war in the Netherlands.

This is not to suggest that any of these considerations are irrelevant, as both the international aspects and the tensions within the Empire contributed to a situation with the potential for war. They may indeed have been necessary preconditions, which is why they have been discussed at some length here, but they were not of themselves sufficient causes. Hence more specific factors need to be identified. The logic of the internationalist view, however, is that these were essentially fortuitous, and that had war not followed on from the revolt in Bohemia it would, given the wider situation, have been triggered by some other event. Apart from the fact that this is purely speculative, as the Cold War analogy indicates, such a war would have been a different war, at a different time, possibly with different participants and with different outcomes. For the origins of the war which actually occurred we must now turn to Bohemia.

3

The Bohemian Context

Bohemia disappeared from the map in 1918, when it was incorporated into Czechoslovakia, which a British prime minister later described as 'a far away country' ruled by 'people of whom we know nothing'.¹ Three hundred years earlier, in 1618, it was much more familiar to princes and politicians, as Prague had been the seat of the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II and a centre of European affairs for most of the past forty years. The modern reader, however, may need a little help with the historical geography. The western two-thirds of the modern Czech Republic was then the kingdom of Bohemia, with its capital at Prague and its second city at Pilsen (Plzeň), while the eastern third was the margravate of Moravia, with its capital at Olmütz (Olomouc) although Brünn (Brno) was the largest city. The lands of the Bohemian crown, as they were known, comprised both Bohemia and Moravia, together with the duchy of Silesia and the margravates of Upper and Lower Lusatia. Silesia is the south-western part of modern Poland, and its capital was then Breslau (Wrocław), while the two sections of Lusatia occupy the corner of modern Germany east of Dresden, centred on the towns of Bautzen and Lübben respectively. The association was loose, however, and there were both ethnic and linguistic differences between the territories, each of which had an independent administration. Thus the link was principally the person of the ruling prince, the king of Bohemia, who was also duke of Silesia and margrave of Moravia and the two Lusatias.

Bohemia's ambiguous relationship with the Empire goes right back to the beginning, when Charlemagne extended his Frankish kingdom up to the boundary of the still-tribal region known as Bohemia in the latter part of the eighth century. Rather than seeking to incorporate it into his empire, however, he left it as part of a broad band of tributary territory to the east, from the Adriatic to the Baltic, although there are differing

opinions as to how effectively the dependency was enforced.² On the death of Charlemagne's successor in 843 the empire was divided, initially between his three sons, but in subsequent re-partitions up to 880 effectively into two, a West Frankish kingdom which eventually developed into France, and an East Frankish kingdom which became the Holy Roman Empire. Again Bohemia was left on the tributary fringe, but by this time the Přemyslid clan from the Prague area was beginning to establish local dominance, becoming dukes of Bohemia in a dynasty which lasted over 400 years until 1306 (one of its members being 'Good King Wenceslas', duke from 921 to his murder in 935). Two of the dukes attained the title of king on an individual basis, in 1085 and 1158 respectively, before the designation became permanent in 1212. Curiously, the title was granted by the emperor although Bohemia was outside the Empire, added to which one of the central principles of the Empire was that there were no kings other than the 'Roman king', that is the emperor. In this period, though, emperors and popes sometimes had to contend with rival candidates or schismatic competing office-holders, and in 1212 this honour was probably the *quid pro quo* for political support for the young Emperor Friedrich II against his adversary.

Exactly how the king of Bohemia came to be the seventh elector of the Empire is uncertain, and indeed even how the first six were established is by no means clear, as like much else in the Empire the election process evolved gradually. The Frankish kingdoms were originally hereditary, but there were also long-standing ideas of selection based on the suitability of the available candidates, partly because the church disliked the heathen origins of clan heredity.³ Hence a combined approach emerged in which the king was indeed elected, but the choice was restricted to the old king's relatives, with a presumption in favour of a son. If he had no son the incumbent might designate an alternative relative as his successor, so that a wider selection only became necessary in the event of a failure in the dynastic line.

During the high Middle Ages the king was in theory elected by the whole people, although in practice participation was limited to the great of the Empire. Even so the circle of those entitled to vote was wide, and in one such election of a 'Roman king' in 1024 all seven of the later electors, including the duke of Bohemia, took part, but so did many other dukes, bishops and abbots from Germany and beyond.⁴ A significant change followed a disputed election in 1198, when one party sought the support of the pope, leading to a ruling that in future the election must take place 'on Frankish soil', and that the involvement of certain individuals was essential, namely the archbishops of Mainz, Cologne and

Trier, as well as the prince of the Rhine Palatinate, although the remainder of the electorate was not defined. In the 1220s the duke of Saxony and the margrave of Brandenburg were added to this group, which held its own vote first, although a wider election still followed in which all the ecclesiastical and temporal princes took part. By the time of another disputed election in 1257 this latter formality had lapsed, and the same six, with the addition at this stage of the king of Bohemia, had gained the right of election, while the other princes had been excluded from the process. Even then the principle of majority voting had not been accepted, and this, together with a clear set of rules, had to await the Golden Bull of 1356.⁵

The available information thus indicates dates by when these successive developments had occurred, but not how or why, and nor is it apparent why these particular princes and prelates became electors while others did not. The three archbishops were also the archchancellors of the territories of the Empire in Germany, Italy and Burgundy respectively, while the temporal electors each held one of the ceremonial offices of state (steward, marshal, chamberlain and cup-bearer), but how they acquired these offices, and whether they became electors by virtue of them or vice versa, remains obscure. It should also be noted that in this period the elected candidate officially became only king of the Romans, not progressing to emperor until crowned by the pope, which often happened years or decades later, and sometimes not at all, as it involved a long and possibly hazardous journey to Rome. Charles V was the last emperor actually crowned by the pope, in 1530, and as this made no practical difference the term 'emperor' is used generically below. By the early modern period the title of king of the Romans had acquired a different significance, that of emperor-designate, and emperors began to seek election for their sons in their own lifetime as a means of securing the succession.

Bohemia moved closer to the centre of events in the fourteenth century, after Johann of Luxembourg, son of the then emperor, married the younger sister of the last Přemyslid king, a teenager who had been assassinated four years previously. Johann secured the throne of Bohemia for himself in 1311, and his son succeeded him in 1346, going on to become Emperor Karl IV in 1355. In this capacity he issued the Golden Bull of 1356 which, among other things, formalised the rules for the appointment of future emperors, naturally including the king of Bohemia as one of the electors. Karl made Prague his capital, and he is considered to be one of the most capable of the medieval emperors. Unfortunately this proved to be a high point for Bohemia, as although Karl's son Wenzel

succeeded him in Bohemia and the Empire in 1378 he was regarded as incompetent and dethroned as emperor in 1400. Despite similar problems in Bohemia he retained the crown until his death, childless, in 1419, living just long enough to be involved in the outbreak of the Hussite revolt.

The Hussite revolt

This revolt in the early fifteenth century was a seminal event in Bohemian history, and one which was still significant in 1618, some two hundred years later. Jan Hus himself was not directly involved, as he had been executed for heresy a few years earlier, but although his ideas were not the only underlying causes of the revolt his death was its principal trigger. Hus was an academic and sometime rector of Prague university, and like many academics of the period he was also in holy orders and a regular and respected preacher. His religious outlook was strongly influenced by the thought and writings of the Oxford theologian John Wycliffe, who died in 1384, and like him and like Luther later Hus sought the reform rather than the replacement of the established Catholic order. Wycliffe's ideas on grace and predestination, although complex, effectively undermined the claim to authority of the pope and the church hierarchy, as well as the right of the church and its prelates to hold lands or to exercise temporal power. Instead he accorded supremacy in worldly matters to the secular authorities, while criticising the wealth and the many abuses he saw in the church of his day. Although Wycliffe himself was never excommunicated many of his teachings were subsequently proscribed by the pope, despite which they built up a strong following in Bohemia, and in Prague in particular, in the first decade of the 1400s. Starting in the university, where Hus was one of a number of proponents, this spread to include a significant proportion of the nobility, as well as townsmen, before the archbishop of Prague took action in 1409, burning Wycliffe's books and prohibiting preaching on their themes. Hus and others ignored this, publicly defending Wycliffe's works and inciting demonstrations in Prague, while the archbishop, finding no support from the king, was forced to flee the city.

In the following few years the controversy escalated, with Hus increasingly in the forefront. Matters came to a head in 1412 when, in another link with Luther, he publicly criticised the sale of indulgences (absolution from sins for the payment of a fee), leading to papal confirmation of his earlier excommunication for failing to obey the ban on Wycliffe

preaching. Within Bohemia he remained safe due to the strength of his support, but in 1414 he accepted Emperor Sigismund's request and offer of safe-conduct to present his case at the general council of the church in Constance. There, instead of receiving a full hearing, he was arrested, put on trial for heresy, and burnt at the stake in June 1415.

Hus thus became the symbol of the revolt which followed, in which neither he nor even his own specific ideas were truly central, and indeed the term 'Hussite' is a later encapsulation which was used at the time only by opponents. There were a number of other elements involved apart from the religious aspects, including the academic and political ambitions of many at the university, the broader political aspirations of the nobility, and the efforts of the Prague council to augment the leading role of the city, as well as an early form of Czech linguistic nationalism with strong anti-German overtones. Even where religion was concerned 'Hussite' was and is a catch-all term embracing a broad spectrum of views, from conservatives who wanted little more than modest reforms of the worst existing Catholic abuses, to extreme radicals who set up their own communities intended to emulate the early Christian church, including one completely new town, Tábor, run initially on communal principles. In doctrinal terms the limited amount of common ground became defined around four main tenets. The best known of these was the right of the laity, rather than only the priest, to receive communion in both kinds, *sub utraque specie*, that is to take the wine as well as the bread, from which the name Utraquists for the participants was derived. To this implicit denial of priestly otherness was added freedom of preaching, limitation of the property-holding and secular powers of the church, and the civil punishment of mortal sins, including those of the clergy, without respect of person.

As is often the case, external pressures provided the strongest impetus towards unity, as after the execution of Hus the Council of Constance produced ideas of some form of crusade to eliminate heresy from Bohemia. A large number of the Bohemian nobility had protested against Hus's trial, and they renewed this protest after his death, going on to form a defensive league to protect themselves and Hussite preachers against any internal repression or external intervention. The weak and ageing King Wenzel first temporised, but later supported the efforts of the church to reassert control in Bohemia, so that a confused three-way struggle ensued involving the loyal Catholics and the conservative and radical wings of the Hussites. One notable event, famously imitated by the rebels in 1618, occurred during a big Hussite rally in Prague in July 1419, when hostile city councillors were seized and thrown to their

deaths from the windows of the New Town city hall. Fearing revolution, Wenzel changed tack again, appointing pro-Hussite councillors before his own death a few weeks later.

As he had no children the heir apparent was his half-brother Sigismund, king of Hungary, who had been emperor since 1411, and was thus indirectly responsible for Hus's death. Negotiations with the Hussite leaders followed, during which Sigismund made concessions sufficient only to win over the more conservative, including the city of Prague and its university. With his support thus limited to the moderates and the remaining Catholic nobility, and lacking acceptance by the Estates, he decided instead to resort to force, gathering his troops at Breslau in 1420 for a papally authorised anti-Hussite crusade. Again the external threat prompted a unified response, as even the moderates were not prepared to see Czech Bohemia invaded and conquered by a largely German power. The Hussites proved surprisingly adept militarily, and Sigismund was twice defeated in the following campaign, although he did manage to have himself crowned while he held Prague briefly. Nevertheless the nobility refused to accept him as king on the grounds that they had not elected him, an argument which reappeared two hundred years later.⁶

The remaining history of the Hussite period is one of a growing split over the following decade between the moderates centred in Prague and the radicals based around their independent communities, particularly Tábor. The latter provided the principal military strength, defeating further attempts at outside intervention and even themselves making significant incursions into Germany. However over time their social radicalism and their liturgical departures from Catholic practice lost them support among the nobility, a fact which became critical when the Council of Basel proposed negotiations for the return of Hussites to the church on the basis of the four tenets noted above. The resulting discussions in 1433 failed to produce an agreement, leading a number of Hussite barons to join with Prague and with the Bohemian Catholics to raise an army to oppose the radicals, who were decisively defeated in battle in 1434. Resumed negotiations then led to the Compact of Basel whereby Utraquism was accepted by the church, while Sigismund was finally able to occupy the throne of Bohemia in 1436, although he died a year later.

Fuller summaries of the Hussite period are readily available, and further comment here must be confined to aspects which had echoes in the circumstances surrounding the revolt of 1618.⁷ A starting point is the considerable diminution of the standing and possessions of the Catholic

church in Bohemia which resulted. Although Utraquism in the form accepted by the Compact of Basel did not differ radically from established Catholicism other than in the taking of communion in both kinds it was nevertheless separate, and indeed it is said to be the first such division officially approved by the Roman church. Hence the concept of separate Christian confessions had a head start in Bohemia by the time Luther's Reformation began to take hold, so that by 1600 only a small minority remained truly Catholic. During the Hussite period the Catholic church also suffered major losses of property, moving from owning of the order of 30 per cent of the land to being left with very little, while major ecclesiastical institutions often ended up as tenants of the crown. Partly as a result and partly due to events during the revolt the church also lost its position in the Estates of the kingdom, leaving it with less of a political role than in most other countries in Europe.

The real beneficiary, however, was not the king but the nobility, which managed to acquire land both from the church through support for the Hussites, and from Sigismund as the price of their support for him in the last stages. Its political standing was likewise enhanced, as it had been evident throughout that noble support was crucial to the survival of the Hussite cause. The nobility had previously engaged in a power struggle with King Wenzel from 1394 to 1405, ending with a victory whereby, among other gains, appointments to the royal council were henceforth subject to baronial approval and the king was, some suggest, reduced to merely the first among equals in the land. The Estates, principally the nobility, had in the past made acceptance of a new king conditional upon a formal capitulation, a series of promises extracted from the prospective monarch regulating and limiting his use of power. Following Wenzel's death, however, matters had gone much further, as the Hussite nobility had first negotiated with and then denied the crown to the heir apparent, Sigismund, effectively keeping him from becoming king for seventeen years, while it was the nobility which finally placed him upon the throne.

Equally significant was the fact that the revolt achieved for Bohemia a degree of religious freedom unprecedented at the time, and that wider European influences were involved. Where in 1618 this would be international Calvinism, in the early 1400s it was Wycliffe's thought and the English Lollard movement to which it led. For example Peter Payne, the then principal of the present author's Oxford college, St Edmund Hall, fled around 1413 to avoid arrest and possible execution as a Wycliffite heretic, arriving a few years later in Bohemia, where as Peter Ingliss (Peter the Englishman) he played a significant part in the councils of

the Hussites throughout the period of the revolt.⁸ No less relevant than European influences, however, was the ethnic basis of the revolt, pitting native Bohemians and Czech speakers against an outside prince of German extraction.

Habsburg Bohemia

After four hundred years of the Přemyslids and a century and a quarter of the Luxembourgers up to the death of Sigismund in 1437 there were several changes of dynasty in Bohemia over the next ninety years. This included a first period of Habsburg rule (apart from a brief interregnum in 1307), although most of this was a long minority, and another period in which the crown of the Bohemian lands was first contested and then divided between the king of Hungary and the son of the king of Poland. Eventually the survivor gained both Hungary and the Bohemian lands, leaving these to his ten-year-old son in 1516. Ten years later this young king was killed fleeing after the battle of Mohács, where he had tried in vain to defend Hungary from the invading Turkish sultan Suleyman the Magnificent. As he had neither children nor brothers the next in line was his elder and only sister, wife of the Habsburg Archduke Ferdinand of Austria. Thus Ferdinand, brother of Emperor Charles V, became king, although his accession by no means followed automatically from this relationship, and he had to submit himself as a candidate in an election by the Estates.⁹ In the preceding negotiations Ferdinand had both to confirm the rights and privileges of the Estates and to guarantee that the administration of the kingdom would remain in the hands of native Bohemians before he could secure the necessary support at an assembly in December 1526. At the same time he also became king of Hungary, although in a disputed election, and he was able to establish Habsburg control only in part of the north and west of the territory (see Chapter 1).

The procedure for establishing a king of Bohemia, like that for electing the emperor, had developed over the centuries, but whereas the Golden Bull of 1356 had codified the latter, in Bohemia it remained imprecise and open to different interpretations based on often conflicting precedents. As with the original Frankish kingdom there was a general presumption of hereditary succession from father to son, but the position was less clear when this did not apply and other relatives became candidates. Only when there was no available successor from the ruling dynasty was an election definitely required. Nevertheless all prospective new kings, including sons and relatives of the predecessor, had to be

accepted by the Estates, although again there was no firm basis for this other than precedent, and neither the distinction between confirmation and election nor the consequences should a candidate in the event not be accepted were clear. Although succession disputes arose at times during the long dynastic reigns of the Přemyslids and Luxembourgers these uncertainties were not the principal problem, but they were to play a significant part in the Bohemian revolt of 1618.

Ferdinand, only 23 when he gained the Bohemian crown, reigned for 37 years, the last six also as emperor following his brother Charles V's abdication, before he was succeeded by his son Emperor Maximilian II in 1564, the latter in turn being succeeded by his son Emperor Rudolf II in 1576. The most striking feature of Ferdinand's era was the rapid, relatively peaceful but far-reaching spread of the Reformation in Bohemia, and also, although to varying degrees, in the other lands of the Bohemian crown and in Hungary, as well as in the Habsburg hereditary lands in Austria. Ferdinand made efforts to limit Protestant progress, including assisting the Jesuits to establish themselves in his territories, but he was careful to avoid a confrontation and to maintain his own position by playing off one group in the Estates against another, not least because he needed their financial support for defence against the Turks.

Maximilian, often viewed as personally sympathetic to Protestantism, continued this approach, and he granted significant religious concessions to the Estates of Upper and Lower Austria in 1568. During his reign the more moderate Protestants in Bohemia sought to agree a common doctrinal position in order to obtain official recognition, and for this reason they modelled their draft closely on the Augsburg Confession. They submitted this to Maximilian in 1575, obtaining his verbal approval, but under papal pressure he went no further, although the Protestants nevertheless subsequently maintained that their Bohemian Confession had royal authorisation.¹⁰

Nevertheless the religious situation remained complicated. Following the Reformation the Hussite Utraquists had split into Catholic-style and Protestant-style wings, and although the latter, together with the Lutherans, joined in the Bohemian Confession they also held to their own positions. The more extreme Protestants belonged mainly to the Bohemian Brethren, which had both strong national-political links and Calvinist connections, and which, like the Reformed in Germany, exercised considerable influence despite its relatively modest numbers. The remaining Catholics were also disproportionately influential, as they were favoured by the Habsburg rulers in making governmental

appointments. Other sub-divisions and fringe groups further complicated the picture, so that in the 1580s a noted local pastor and writer complained that 'in Bohemia and Moravia there are some thirty separate sects, each with its own slant and standpoint'.¹¹

Numbers quoted for most things are generally suspect in this period, and religion is no exception. Thus although it is widely agreed that the great majority of the population of Bohemia, including most of the nobility, were Protestants of one form or another by the latter part of the sixteenth century, the figure of 90 per cent sometimes claimed cannot be relied upon. There was also a linguistic divide among the Protestants, in that the German-speakers tended to be Lutherans, while the Czech-speaking majority mostly belonged to one or other of the several variants of Hussite Utraquism or to the Bohemian Brethren. At that time there were also Protestant majorities in the Estates of the other Bohemian and Habsburg lands, although larger in some than in others, while Protestant strength was generally greater among the nobility than among the ordinary people. Thus some modern work suggests that in the core regions of Upper and Lower Austria only a little more than half of the active parishes were in Protestant hands, and many of these were associated with noble estates.¹² Reformed or Calvinist influences were widespread but mainly confined to a small elite, although they had made considerable progress in Hungary and Transylvania.

In contrast to the Empire, there was no conflict over secularisation of church land, as the church had already lost most of this during the Hussite period more than a hundred years earlier. Instead both landed wealth and political control of the Estates in Bohemia were firmly in the hands of the upper classes. According to one estimate about a tenth of the land belonged to the king, and most of the rest to the nobility, apart from a little owned by some forty towns and cities which were direct fiefs of the crown, and an even smaller proportion belonging to free peasants. The nobility itself was stratified into a clear hierarchy, within which there were two main divisions with membership in 1605 assessed as 254 lords and 1128 knights, although a modern estimate suggests that there were relatively fewer lords and more of the lesser ranks, while noble families made up around 1 per cent of the total population.¹³

The other Habsburg lands

Bohemia was only one of the Austrian Habsburgs' large but unwieldy collection of territories, and to understand the revolt of 1618 it will also be necessary to look at events which occurred both beforehand and in

parallel elsewhere in their domains. Some background information may therefore be helpful.

At this time the Habsburg possessions comprised three main elements: the 'hereditary lands', the lands of the Bohemian crown, and the Habsburg-controlled part of Hungary. Only in the first group of territories, however, which were mainly in Austria, was Habsburg rule relatively secure. In the Bohemian lands and Hungary, even in 1617, almost a century after Ferdinand I had gained the crowns for himself, his dynasty was by no means assured of the continuing succession. In both cases the position of king was dependent upon election or acceptance by the Estates, and while the eldest son of the previous incumbent was traditionally approved, at least in Bohemia, even then the magnates usually drove a hard bargain over the promises the candidate was required to make in the capitulation. Should there not be a son available, as was the case in 1617, the succession could become much more problematic. The king thus needed to tread carefully politically in order to maintain support not only for himself but for his prospective heir, while his powers were further limited by the extensive freedoms guaranteed to the Estates both by constitutional precedent and by the king's own individual capitulation. Taxation, the appointment of government officers, and the administration of the legal systems were in large measure either subject to the approval of or actually controlled by the Estates, which in Hungary were even more powerful and independent than in Bohemia. Moreover Hungary was divided, disputed, and under constant threat from the Turks or their Christian tributaries, principally Transylvania, constraining the freedom of action of the Habsburg rulers still further.

In the Middle Ages the Habsburg family had been minor dukes in the area where the Swiss cantons, Alsace and south-west Germany meet, and in the early seventeenth century their hereditary lands still included a number of small territories, confusingly known as Further Austria, in this region. Their real power base in Austria itself had been acquired under the Habsburg Emperor Rudolf I in 1282, but this too was a patchwork of individual provinces, each with its own name, constitutional traditions and Estates. The terminology is equally confusing, further complicated by various reorganisations of the territories among members of the family through inheritances, but essentially there were four main parts. The north west was known as Upper Austria, with Linz as its principal city, while the north east, governed from Vienna, was Lower Austria. As the boundary was the river Enns, a tributary of the Danube, they were also commonly referred to at the time as the lands above

(west) of the Enns and the lands below (east) of the Enns. The southern sections were the Tyrol, part of which is in modern-day northern Italy, and Inner Austria, which was further divided into the provinces of Styria, Carinthia, Carniola and Gorizia, the latter on the Adriatic and now also in Italy. The bishopric of Salzburg, which had substantial lands in Austria, was however not a Habsburg possession. (To avoid further confusion it should be noted that in 1627, in the aftermath of the defeat of the revolt, the lands of the Bohemian crown were also made hereditary, so that in later periods they are often included in the term 'hereditary lands'.)

Although none of the Austrian provinces were kingdoms or had elective elements in the installation of their ruling princes, in practice the latter still had to negotiate capitulations with their Estates before the members would consent to take the oaths of allegiance which would recognise and validate the succession. The magnates had long used this as a lever to enable them to retain the freedoms and powers which the Estates had enjoyed since medieval times, while the princes' recurrent needs for taxation to maintain defences against the Turks provided opportunities to extend these further, particularly in respect of religion. As in Hungary and Bohemia, by the turn of the seventeenth century most of the nobility in the Austrian provinces were Protestant, and although their Catholic rulers had made efforts to contain or even reverse this situation they faced both legal and practical constraints. The *ius reformandi* stemming from the 1555 peace of Augsburg was valid only within the Empire, and although this applied in Austria it definitely did not in Hungary, while as has been noted the status of Bohemia was at best ambiguous. Legalities aside however, for the most part the Habsburg princes were simply not powerful enough within their own lands, politically or financially, to impose their Catholic religion against the determined opposition of the Protestant nobility. Their attempts to do so, and the opposing efforts of their Estates to secure and extend their religious and political freedoms, led eventually to the revolt of 1618.

4

Counter-Reformation

The early years

In formal religious terms the Counter-Reformation began with the Council of Trent of 1545 to 1563, and with the reforms and renewal of the Catholic church which stemmed from it. In political practice, however, the Counter-Reformation can also be seen in the actions of Catholic princes who set out to reverse the rise of Protestantism in their domains, and to re-establish Catholicism as the sole religion of their subjects. Their motives were also political, in that religious dissent was viewed as going hand in hand with other potential challenges to the established social order, so that regaining confessional uniformity was seen as essential to maintaining political compliance.

There was some truth in this thesis, as after the Reformation efforts to secure concessions in respect of religious freedoms quickly became bound up with the longer-running struggle between princes and their Estates over the division of power. In most of Europe the medieval tradition of government by a prince in the 'parliament' of his peers, primarily the nobility and prelates, still applied, but the practice was becoming steadily more confrontational than cooperative, with each side seeking the upper hand. By the beginning of the early modern period the Estates had in many places reached a high point in their share of authority, and a princely fight-back was beginning to emerge, a turning of the tide which would eventually lead to eighteenth-century absolutism. In the late sixteenth century this was still a distant prospect, but the tensions between rulers and Estates were very much current, and nowhere more so than in the lands of the Austrian Habsburgs. Religious differences exacerbated the problems, and although both sides were doubtless sincere in their convictions their respective efforts to secure or deny religious freedoms also became central to the wider conflict.

There was a significant difference between Germany and the Habsburg lands in the early attempts to re-establish territorial religious unity. In the former the process, traumatic though it was for individuals, generated few major conflicts, whereas in the latter it was the principal source of dissension for decades, essentially because of the mismatch between Catholic princes and predominantly Protestant nobilities and populations. In much of Germany the Reformation had made broadly parallel progress among both the rulers and the ruled, particularly in the north, so that Lutheran princes and populations were commonly matched, leaving only comparatively small Catholic minorities in many principalities. Moreover this applied even in ecclesiastical territories such as Magdeburg, where the bishop too eventually became a Protestant. On the other hand it seems that where the bishops remained firmly Catholic the penetration of Lutheranism in their territories was more limited, so that when, armed with their *ius reformandi* after 1555, they set about recatholicisation, they too were usually concerned only with a non-conforming minority.

Problems, disturbances and expulsions there certainly were, but because of the fragmentation of Germany into a large number of mainly small territories these tended to be localised and to present little opportunity for more widely organised opposition. This same fragmentation may also have acted as a safety valve, providing scope for individuals, particularly the nobility and the better-off opinion leaders, to practise their religion in, or even to move to, a nearby territory where their own confession was the official one. There were also places, including a number although by no means the majority of the free Imperial cities, where the religions continued to co-exist, a notable example being the large territories of Cleves-Jülich, where the dukes did not seek to impose uniformity. The result was that by the opening decade of the seventeenth century the main religious tension in Germany was not within but between territories, as demonstrated by the formation of the rival alliances, the Protestant Union and the Catholic League. In direct contrast the Habsburg lands appeared monolithic externally, but were riven by internal religious differences between princes and Estates.

Bavaria was the first major German principality to undertake compulsory recatholicisation, and it is also a good example of how this religious issue had significant political ramifications. During the early years following the Reformation the duchy largely resisted the spread of Lutheran beliefs, but even here they eventually made progress under the influence of neighbouring Protestant territories. The Estates also saw Protestantism as a means of strengthening their position in relation to

the ruling dynasty, and Albrecht V, who became duke in 1550, was initially forced by financial necessity to make concessions. In 1563, however, he changed tack, launching proceedings against the Lutheran nobility on grounds of a supposed conspiracy, as well as reforming and reactivating the church for a campaign of recatholicisation, in course of which many who would not comply were forced to emigrate. Although undertaken ostensibly on religious grounds, these measures also laid the foundations for increasingly absolutist rule, as the exclusion of Protestant nobles and city representatives broke the power of the Estates, reducing their assembly to little more than a committee summoned from time to time to provide for the financial needs of the ruler. Bavaria thus largely dispensed with the traditional sharing of power between prince and Estates, a process which was extended and consolidated by Albrecht's son, and particularly by his grandson Maximilian I in the last decade of the century.¹

Emperor Ferdinand I had already made much more cautious attempts to limit religious dissent in Bohemia, including bringing about the reunification of the Catholics and the 'old' Utraquists, who by this time were effectively neo-Catholics apart from the question of communion in both kinds. The Protestant majority also came under pressure, and some fifty Lutheran preachers were forced into exile in 1555, but otherwise Ferdinand's efforts met with only limited success in the face of Estates opposition, although he did succeed in having the Catholic archbishopric of Prague, vacant since the Hussite period, re-established in 1561. His son Maximilian II, who succeeded him in 1564, was more conciliatory, perhaps because of his personal sympathies, as well as equally constrained by the Estates because of his need for grants of taxation. As noted in the previous chapter, he thus made significant religious concessions in both Upper and Lower Austria in 1568, as well as giving oral approval to the Bohemian Confession of 1575 in the last year of his life. Unlike the Augsburg Confession upon which it was based, however, this document was never formally adopted by the relevant constituent body, in this case the Bohemian Estates, so that although the Lutherans and some other Protestant groups claimed for the next 45 years that it had granted them legitimacy and associated rights this was far from well-founded legally.²

Ferdinand of Styria

Before pursuing the twists and turns of counter-Reformation in the main Habsburg lands it is convenient to digress both territorially

and chronologically to look at the most determined challenge to Protestantism, that of the young Archduke Ferdinand of Styria, as he then was, the later Emperor Ferdinand II.

In 1564 Ferdinand's father Karl, a younger son of Emperor Ferdinand I, had inherited Inner Austria, that is the provinces of Styria, Carinthia, Carniola and Gorizia, where the majority of the inhabitants and most of the nobility had converted to Lutheranism and were pressing for religious freedom. The position of the Estates was considerably strengthened by the fact that this was frontier country, as although its long eastern border was on to Habsburg Hungary this was only a relatively narrow strip of land, and Ottoman Hungary lay directly beyond. The Turkish threat and the associated need for money was ever present, and the Estates knew how to use this to their advantage. After years of friction Karl was eventually constrained to make the Bruck Pacification in 1578, whereby he promised the Estates of his provinces jointly assembled in the eponymous town that no-one would in future be oppressed because of his religion, and that Lutheran preachers would not be expelled from the principal cities. Although this was by no means the Protestant *carte blanche* which has sometimes been suggested it was enough to earn Karl the opprobrium of his fellow Catholics, a warning from the pope that he was endangering his own soul, and the disapproval of his ardently Catholic wife. In the remaining six years of his life he hardened his position against the Protestants as far as he could without actually breaking his word and withdrawing the Pacification, but in his testament to his young son he pointedly noted that his successors were not bound by it, urging him to do his utmost to return the provinces to the true church.³

Ferdinand, born in 1578 and only six at the time of his father's death, was in no position to respond to this exhortation for many years, but both his temperament and his upbringing ensured that he would be minded to do so as soon as the opportunity presented itself. His mother, a Bavarian princess and the principal influence on the growing boy, pointed him clearly in that direction, as did his education at the Jesuit college in Ingolstadt, where his cousin, the later Duke Maximilian I of Bavaria, was a fellow pupil, albeit five years older. Even by the highest Catholic standards of the time Ferdinand was extraordinarily committed to his faith, as Bireley notes:

Religion was the dominant force in his life. According to Lamormaini [his confessor], each morning upon rising he devoted an hour to meditation before he attended two Masses in his private chapel. In

the course of a normal day, another hour was spent in either mental or vocal prayer. Besides this, on Sundays and feast days he participated in the Solemn Mass in the court chapel in the morning and in vesper services in the afternoon.

The same source reports that Ferdinand 'often asserted both in writing and orally that he would give up his provinces and kingdoms more readily and more gladly than knowingly neglect an opportunity to extend the faith', an attitude which is confirmed by his actions, both in Inner Austria as a young man and later as emperor, when he pursued his religious objectives apparently regardless of the political and indeed physical risks. Rather than indicating a blind faith that God would be on his side, though, this seems to have stemmed more from a kind of religious fatalism, a belief that God's will would be done, whatever it might be, a view which he himself enunciated at one particular time of crisis in his life, observing that 'human resources and power are at His disposal, and He gives them and takes them away as He will'.⁴

After a long regency Ferdinand's personal rule in Inner Austria began in December 1596, when the emperor formally declared him to be of age, but it was not until 1598, after returning from a journey to Rome, that he began his moves against the Protestant majority in his domains. It has been argued that these should be principally attributed not to the man himself, barely twenty and generally agreed to have been immature, impressionable, and in more worldly matters somewhat indecisive, but to the prelates, Jesuits, and above all his mother, who pressed him to act.⁵ Nevertheless Ferdinand had enough other councillors who were advising caution, pointing to the risks of tackling the majority head on, and warning of disturbances, armed resistance and even civil war, particularly at a time when the long-standing Turkish threat had escalated again into open war. Exactly these considerations had led his father to compromise, whereas Ferdinand approached the issue in a determined, even reckless manner in which his own conviction that he was performing his religious duty must have played a considerable part.

He did not, of course, act completely on his own initiative and according to his own plan. On the contrary he followed the shrewd advice of one of his councillors, an elderly bishop, who recommended a step by step campaign, taking on the weakest opponents first, seeking to isolate them from potential wider support, and defeating them before moving on to others. The nobility were the most likely to resist and the most capable of arming themselves to do so, so they should not be challenged, in the expectation that if not directly threatened they would

probably not intervene on behalf of their co-religionists in the lower orders. Moreover the Turkish war was actually helpful in this respect, as many of the nobility were away on campaign with the Imperial armies. The Protestant preachers themselves were the weakest link, opined the bishop, and after them the peasantry and the citizens of the towns.⁶

The starting point was the Styrian capital city of Graz, where in September 1598 an order was issued to all Protestant preachers, schoolteachers and academics, that they were to leave the city forthwith and to be out of the archduke's territory within eight days or face severe punishment. Taken by surprise, those affected were in no position to resist, appeals for help to the local nobility achieved nothing, and some nineteen of them departed hastily into what they hoped would be a temporary exile across the Hungarian border. Naturally there were complaints, but these received little sympathy from the emperor in Prague and even less from Ferdinand, who moved troops into Graz to quell any opposition in advance of an Estates meeting early the following year. Again there were wordy protests but nothing more, and Ferdinand declared himself immovable in his resolve to stand by his actions.

Encouraged by this initial success and the lack of any effective resistance, Ferdinand and his advisers sent reformation commissions, each headed by a senior cleric and backed by a detachment of troops, to tour northern Styria during 1599. They descended upon towns and villages one after another, closing Protestant places of worship and cemeteries, confiscating and burning Lutheran books, and obliging the population individually to swear obedience to the archduke in both civil and religious matters, while any who hesitated were threatened with banishment. The great majority complied, even in an area where a couple of years before a government official sent to enquire into religious disorders had been met with hostility bordering on open defiance, another example of the link feared by the authorities between religious and political non-conformity. By the end of the year the commissions had completed their work in northern Styria and moved on south, and by mid-1600 the whole of Styria had been recatholicised, at least outwardly.⁷

The process, duly extended to the other provinces of Inner Austria, was completed in under two years, forcibly enough but without open resistance or bloodshed. An estimated 2500 Protestants were forced into exile, including most of the wealthiest, as Ferdinand himself admitted, but this was a price he was prepared to pay. Among them was the famous astronomer and mathematician Johannes Kepler, ironically to better himself soon afterwards by gaining an appointment in Prague with

another Catholic Habsburg prince, Emperor Rudolf II.⁸ Even Ferdinand, however, was sufficiently cautious not to press the issue too far with the nobility, who were left with the right to practise their Protestant religion privately within the confines of their own homes. Nevertheless they lost most of their political power, as in reasserting religious control Ferdinand also established his own position as something approaching an absolutist prince at the expense of the Estates. At the same time he made himself a hero among Catholics and a corresponding *bête noire* for Protestants throughout the Habsburg lands and the wider Empire. His approach was fully legal in enforcing his *ius reformandi* in accordance with the peace of Augsburg of 1555, but he pressed it further, harder and faster than others in the Habsburg lands felt it prudent to do.

Rudolf II

When Emperor Ferdinand I died in 1564 he divided his possessions in order to make provision for his younger sons Ferdinand and Karl, the former inheriting Tyrol and Further Austria, while the latter, as noted above, inherited Inner Austria. The remainder, the provinces of Upper and Lower Austria, together with the lands of the Bohemian and Hungarians crowns, went to his heir and successor, Emperor Maximilian II, but when the latter died suddenly in October 1576 he left no will regarding his territories, although he had already secured the election of his eldest son Rudolf as king of both Hungary and Bohemia. The need to provide for the latter's five brothers (one of whom died soon afterwards) thus led to a negotiation, principally between their respective advisers, although this did not reach a conclusion until April 1578. A further division of the lands was quickly rejected because the resulting multiple territories would each be too small to support the dignity of an archduke in accordance with contemporary expectations, so that it was decided that Rudolf should retain Maximilian's entire inheritance, while his brothers were to be compensated with cash annuities. This family compact was not agreed without dissension, however, particularly over how the payments were to be funded and guaranteed, and in the event Rudolf was frequently unable to meet the commitments due to the permanent crisis in his Imperial finances.⁹

The accession of the 24-year-old Rudolf II brought an entirely different kind of man to the Bohemian, Hungarian, and Imperial thrones. His mother was a Spanish princess, and at the age of eleven he had been sent off to the court of Philip II in Spain, remaining there until he was nineteen and returning both more conventionally Catholic and

also less inclined to diplomatic compromise than his father. The latter characteristic was soon evident, both in the Habsburg lands, where he quickly departed from Maximilian's policy of informal accommodation with the Protestants, and also in the Empire, where his change of approach triggered off the long-running dispute over the exclusion of the administrator of Magdeburg from the Reichstag in 1582, as discussed in Chapter 1. Another early change was Rudolf's decision to abandon Vienna and set up his court in Prague, a city from which he increasingly rarely emerged as time went by, while in his latter years he confined himself almost entirely to the precincts of Prague castle.

Rudolf's complex personality has baffled contemporaries and historians alike, as Evans shows in a useful summary of the contrasting and conflicting observations made at the time, and the wide range of interpretations subsequently derived from them.¹⁰ Highly intelligent and sensitive, but eccentric and unstable, his private interests ranged from science and the arts to astrology and exotic animals, while he was an eclectic and extravagant collector of both the old and the new, from Dürer paintings to the latest and boldest experiments. Under his influence and patronage Prague became a world city and an intellectual centre, attracting leading thinkers, scientists and artists, many of them indeed Protestants like Kepler, but numerous fantasists and downright charlatans also flocked to the court.¹¹

Rudolf's personal life was equally unconventional, particularly for a ruling prince of the time, in that although he had half a dozen illegitimate children he never married, and indeed seemed to go to great lengths to avoid marriage. During an eighteen-year engagement to his cousin Isabella, daughter of Philip II of Spain, he repeatedly found reasons for postponing the wedding, until the king finally betrothed her to his younger brother Albrecht, news which Rudolf paradoxically received with 'rage and despair'.¹² Other marriage plans followed, but likewise foundered because of Rudolf's failure to follow them through, despite which possibilities were still being floated until the last years of his life. Meanwhile he rejected all suggestions of naming a successor, seeing in them potential plots by his relatives to deprive him of his throne during his lifetime.

Contemporaries already knew Rudolf to be a strange character when he became emperor, but although anecdotes abound the actual conduct of his government during its first quarter of a century was not notably more erratic than others of the period. The last decade, on the other hand, up to his death in 1612, produced a series of conflicts and crises which, while not entirely attributable to his personality and behaviour,

were certainly closely bound up with them. Around 1600 rumours began to circulate that Rudolf was actually insane, and the elector of the Palatinate, upon whom a regency would have devolved, felt it his duty to have enquiries made. His emissary, the margrave of Ansbach, reported back that he had spoken many times with the emperor, and that 'His Majesty discusses important matters without any sign of mental disturbance, but with deep understanding'. Nevertheless, continued Ansbach, he was prone to severe melancholy, so that he was often unable to attend to any business, and he was also under the malign influence of his chamberlain, who was reported to dabble in the black arts. The papal nuncio was more categorical, reporting to Rome on Rudolf's strange behaviour, particularly in relation to his own religious observances, and concluding bluntly that the devil was evident in his speech.¹³

During these latter years Rudolf's relations with his family, already bad, deteriorated further, ending in an open conflict verging on war with his brother Matthias. This episode has become known as the Habsburg brothers' feud, from the title of a nineteenth-century play by the Austrian dramatist Grillparzer, but while the real events certainly had drama enough the underlying issues were principally political, albeit with personal overtones. They will be described fully in the next chapter, but a little background is necessary. As Rudolf had acquired all his father's lands through the family compact his younger brothers were largely dependent on the unpredictable new emperor, not only for the payment of their annuities, but also for future appointments to offices within the family territories, or for support in gaining offices elsewhere. Rudolf did indeed appoint Ernst, who was close to him in age and had shared his Spanish upbringing, as governor of Upper and Lower Austria, a post which he held until 1592, when Philip II of Spain made him governor in the Netherlands, although he died three years later. To his remaining brothers Rudolf initially offered little or nothing.

Matthias, the next oldest but only nineteen at the time of Rudolf's accession, promptly absconded in an ill-judged attempt to make his own way in the world, which first took him into a risky association with the secessionist Protestant Dutch provinces and eventually left him virtually penniless and living in a half-ruined castle in Linz.¹⁴ Rudolf remained deaf to his ambitions for many years to follow, but he eventually appointed him as Ernst's successor in Upper and Lower Austria. The third brother, Maximilian, entered the Order of German Knights, a religious foundation stemming back to the Crusades, later becoming Grand Master, but he also sought to win election as king of Poland in 1587. The outcome was disputed, and a local war broke out between

factions supporting respectively Maximilian and the son of the king of Sweden, in which Maximilian was both defeated and captured, being released only after intercession by the pope. Rudolf's failure to assist him effectively in either the election or the fighting added to the tensions between the brothers, but he did finally appoint Maximilian as governor of Tyrol when this province reverted to the emperor in the absence of a legally entitled heir. Albrecht, the youngest brother, was also brought up in Spain, and he prospered there without help from Rudolf. He originally went into the church, being designated as a cardinal at the age of seventeen, but he later left holy orders to serve as Spanish governor, first in Portugal and then in the Netherlands. In 1599 he married Philip II of Spain's daughter Isabella, Rudolf's ex-fiancée, the couple becoming joint regents of the Netherlands thereafter.

Troubles in Austria

In the early years of Rudolf's reign it was not in Bohemia or Hungary, but in Austria that the religious conflict became sharpest.¹⁵ The concessions made by Emperor Maximilian II had not only allowed the nobility personal religious freedom but had extended this to churches which belonged to them, a loose definition which they had progressively extended and exploited, particularly in Upper Austria, to bring a large number of churches in the countryside under Protestant control. Moreover, despite the fact that the concessions did not include the cities, many urban churches had also adopted an increasingly Protestant approach, notably in Linz and Vienna. Rudolf made attempts early in his reign to roll back these Protestant advances, although he and his advisers quickly realised that some caution was needed in the face of strong opposition from the nobility who dominated the Estates, particularly in Upper Austria, where there was scarcely a Catholic left amongst them. Hence the stern decrees he issued against Protestant encroachments beyond Maximilian's concessions went unenforced and largely unobserved outside the cities, while the townsmen flocked to attend Protestant services in noble-controlled churches in the surrounding countryside.

This uneasy status quo continued for a number of years before Rudolf renewed his efforts to restore the Catholic position in the mid-1580s, prompting Ernst, his brother and deputy in Upper and Lower Austria, to appoint a commission to drive through the process. One of its leading members was Melchior Khlesl, the son of a Protestant Viennese master baker but himself a Catholic convert and a priest, and who was

later to rise to high office as a cardinal and as Emperor Matthias's first minister and chief adviser. Beginning in 1587, a dozen years before Archduke Ferdinand's similar offensive in Styria, this commission progressed methodically through the Austrian countryside, town by town, forcing first the office-holders and councillors and then the ordinary people to return to Catholicism or face banishment. A parallel campaign against the nobility proceeded through the courts, obliging them one by one to relinquish control over parish churches which they had gained beyond the strict limits of Emperor Maximilian II's original concessions, and some of their pastors were expelled. Even so success was far from universal, particularly in Upper Austria, as on a number of occasions the attempts to displace Protestant ministers were met with determined resistance, mainly from the free peasantry, and in the resulting disturbances the Catholic authorities were obliged to retreat.

Both internal opposition and the looming threat of an external war hindered further progress. Since 1568 a truce with the Turks had been regularly renewed, but in 1590 Sultan Murad III concluded an advantageous peace to end his long-running war with Persia, enabling him to turn his attentions westwards again. Localised hostilities had been a continuous feature of the ill-defined border between Habsburg and Turkish territory in Hungary even during the truce, and in the changed situation these soon developed into open war, the Long Turkish War which began in 1593, so that for a time the internal religious conflict had to take second place. Nevertheless the divisions remained, while discontent was further increased by the burdens of war, not only taxation and the conscription of feudal levies, but also the cost, damage and violence inflicted by the movement of Imperial troops from Germany through Austria to the Hungarian front.

In 1595 this discontent led to a peasants' revolt in Upper Austria. Again religion was the initial issue, as the authorities, prompted by the emperor, sought to resume their counter-Reformationary efforts. Trouble started when the citizens of a small town expelled first the newly appointed Catholic priest, and then the official sent to restore order, following which a meeting of representatives from like-minded towns in the neighbourhood decided to band together to defend themselves and to demand redress for their other grievances, principally the burden of their feudal obligations to their lords. Support from other areas was quickly forthcoming, so that much of Upper Austria joined in while the authorities were still wondering how to respond. Eventually they sent a small military force to suppress the revolt, but when confronted by a

much larger body of armed farmers the soldiers quickly deserted, leaving a handful of dead and the peasants in possession of the field.

Neither side really wanted to fight, particularly as the authorities were divided among themselves. The largely Protestant nobility were sympathetic to the peasants' religious aspirations but hostile to their economic demands, from which they would have been the principal losers, whereas the emperor and his advisers might have been prepared to compromise on the latter but were firm in rejecting any religious concessions. The result was a half-hearted and long-drawn-out negotiation spread over two years, punctuated by occasional further disturbances, before a larger force of Imperial troops *en route* to Hungary was sent in mid-1597, and the peasants capitulated without a battle.

The nobility soon discovered the cost of their reliance on the emperor's troops to put down the revolt. In October 1597 a new commission was appointed to resume the recatholicisation of Upper Austria, armed with a decree from Rudolf which set out to claw back all the encroachments made by the Protestants beyond the narrowest interpretation of the concessions which had been made by Emperor Maximilian II. Essentially this limited the right to freedom of religion to the nobility alone, to be exercised only within the confines of the households in which they actually lived, while all the country parishes over which they had claimed influence and to which they had appointed Protestant pastors were to be returned to the Catholics. Protestant worship was likewise to be eradicated from the towns and cities, even though in many it had been established for half a century. A five-year struggle ensued as these measures were forced through, step by step and place by place, despite opposition from the peasantry in the countryside and from the nobility in the Estates.

By 1604 the nobility were ready to counter-attack, and discussions between Upper and Lower Austria led to a formal complaint to the emperor and a warning that they were not prepared to submit to the latter's restrictive version of Emperor Maximilian II's religious concessions. On the Catholic side a similarly pugnacious stance was being orchestrated by Khlesl, by then the principal adviser to Archduke Matthias, who had become the governor of the two Austrian provinces in succession to Ernst. Encouraged by Catholic successes in gaining control in the towns and recovering parishes in the countryside, Khlesl favoured pressing counter-Reformation further. Rather than arguing endlessly about the detail of Maximilian's concessions, he contended, the emperor should simply annul them entirely, a proposal which he persuaded Matthias to put forward to Vienna, where it met with some sympathy.

The stage seemed to be set for a confrontation, which did indeed take place, but upon this occasion in Hungary rather than in Austria.¹⁶

Discord in Bohemia, revolt in Hungary

While there were religious conflicts in Austria for much of the first three decades of Rudolf's reign there was relatively little trouble in this respect in Bohemia and Hungary.¹⁷ The position of the Estates was particularly strong in both, which together with the Turkish threat in the latter had made princes traditionally wary of provoking problems. Hence attempts at counter-Reformation were initially more restrained, but around the turn of the century the increasingly erratic Rudolf brought the issue to the fore in both territories, beginning by appointing Catholic protagonists step by step to key positions in the governments, particularly in Bohemia, where Zdeněk Lobkowitz, a Jesuit-educated nobleman, became head of the chancellery in 1599.

The long-standing rights and privileges of the Estates in Bohemia were codified under King Vladislav II in 1500, giving them a position of much greater power than in most other European countries, and in 1508 the same king issued a religious edict confirming the position of the Catholics and the Hussite Utraquists as the only two approved confessions, while proscribing sects which diverged from them. Its main target was the Bohemian Brethren, which had developed over the previous fifty years, but at the time the measure affected only a small minority, and most of a century later it had long since lapsed. Consequently there were major implications when Rudolf, encouraged by the Catholics holding Bohemian offices of state, as well as by the papal nuncio, proposed to renew this Vladislav edict and to apply it firmly to everyone, nobility, citizens and peasantry alike, in the quite different circumstances then existing.

In August 1602 he signed a patent ordering its observance, and this was proclaimed publicly in Prague by heralds with trumpets and drums, to the amazement and consternation of large crowds. Taken literally, the edict placed outside the law all who were neither Catholics nor neo-Catholic Utraquists, meaning that debts due to them were not legally enforceable, their testimony would not be accepted in the courts, and their legal contracts such as marriages and wills were invalid. By 1602 most of the Bohemian population were Protestants, mainly Lutherans, and hence the measure was not realistically enforceable, but in practice it was directed principally at the smaller but more militant Protestant groups, once again particularly the Bohemian Brethren. Even here,

though, the courts were not prepared to support those who attempted to renege on their debts or to avoid their other obligations, finding against them on the grounds that 'the state constitution and the city law make no distinction according to faith in cases of debt'.¹⁸ Some individual members of the nobility received orders to dismiss their 'heretical' preachers, although few hastened to obey, and overall the measure had only limited effect.

It did, however, arouse widespread anxiety and antagonism among the Bohemian Protestants, who saw in it a parallel to the pressures being applied to their co-religionists in Upper and Lower Austria. Hence when the Estates were summoned in January 1603 in order to raise a tax for the Turkish war the religious issue gave rise to a long and heated debate, in which the learned and pious Wenzel Budowetz was for the first of many times the principal spokesman for the Protestant nobility. In the event they confined themselves to registering a protest to the emperor and the tax was passed, while although the edict was not withdrawn nor was it consistently implemented, not least because of the escalating crisis in Hungary.

Three-quarters of a century under a Habsburg king had done little to reconcile Hungary, and the nobility in particular, to outside rule. There had been constant complaints and disputes about royal interference in the legal system, and over the increasing prominence of ethnic Germans as holders of the great offices of state and military commands, as well as their acquisitions of Hungarian noble lands. These tensions were further exacerbated by the near-permanent stationing of Imperial troops in the territory for defence against the Turks, men who were often underpaid and under-provisioned, and consequently provided for themselves at the expense of the population. Hence Rudolf's predecessors had preferred not to create further problems by making moves against the Protestant religion, which in both its Lutheran and Calvinist forms was dominant in Hungary. Rudolf was no longer inclined to be so reticent.

The Long Turkish War began with both successes and failures for the Habsburgs, but in 1597 the sultan's Christian tributaries, the prince of Transylvania and his neighbours, took the opportunity to rebel and change sides. With the military position much improved as a result, Rudolf turned on his new allies and seized Transylvania for himself, although only after a prolonged struggle, subsequently using his troops as an army of occupation both there and in Hungary. With this backing he then introduced measures aimed at recatholicisation, despite the fact that there were very few Catholics left in either Hungary or Transylvania.¹⁹ In the process the Catholics sought to recover churches

which had been taken over by Protestants, and one case in particular inflamed tempers and paved the way for the following revolt. In November 1603 the authorities secured a possession order from the emperor for a church in the principal north-Hungarian city of Kaschau (Košice, now in Slovakia), together with an instruction to the military commander of Upper Hungary to enforce it. The citizens resisted, the troops responded violently, and in the resulting proceedings not only were the Protestant pastors expelled but Protestant services were banned in the city, while punitive fines and confiscations were also imposed.²⁰ Property seizures, partly to finance military operations, were also carried out more widely in this period, targeting any Protestant nobles who openly opposed the Habsburg regime and even extending to Stephan Illéshazy, then the holder of the highest office in the government of Hungary.²¹

In February 1604, in the midst of these events, the Hungarian Estates began their scheduled meeting, but far from handling the furious protests and wide-ranging complaints diplomatically Rudolf, through his deputy, chose to use the closing resolution to renew the attack. In it he re-validated a range of measures which his predecessors had enacted in support of the Catholic church but which had long since lapsed, comprising in total a major step towards counter-Reformation and a direct challenge to the predominantly Protestant Hungarian nobility. Resistance coalesced around Stefan Bocskay, a Calvinist magnate with lands straddling the Hungarian–Transylvanian border, and after the failure of a pre-emptive Habsburg move against him this developed into an open revolt.

Bocskay quickly gained both political and military support, whereas the Imperial troops sent against him were ill-organised, unpaid and in no mood or condition to fight a pitched battle, so that after a period of skirmishing they retreated into the relative safety of the mountains in the north, while Bocskay moved on to Kaschau, which went over to him before the end of the year. Other Hungarian cities and magnates followed suit, enabling Bocskay to invade and take Transylvania early in 1605, while the Imperial forces crumbled under Turkish pressure and were quickly forced to retreat back to the Austrian border, leaving him in full control of Habsburg Hungary. At an Estates meeting in April Bocskay was recognised as prince of Hungary and Transylvania, following which he set out to invade Moravia, while the Turkish sultan proposed a joint campaign against the emperor in the autumn.²²

5

The Habsburg Brothers' Feud

By mid-1605 the Habsburg territories were in turmoil. Hungary was in the hands of Bocskay and his rebels, and they were invading Moravia, Bohemia was still simmering over the anti-Protestant Vladislav edict, and a confrontation was looming in Upper and Lower Austria between the Protestant nobility and the Catholic administration of Khlesl and Archduke Matthias. Moreover the Turks were launching a new offensive in the south.

Meanwhile Rudolf, 'a remarkable, but also a remarkably unsuccessful ruler', had become a virtual recluse in his Prague castle, and he had long since ceased to appear in person at Estates meetings.¹ He had always kept personal contact with his ministers to a minimum, receiving reports mainly in writing, but as the years went by he transacted business in an increasingly desultory and sporadic manner. His mental state was deteriorating, and he had frequent bouts of depression. Ministers came and went, with offices passing into the hands of second-rate men and outright opportunists, while access to the emperor and even securing his signature on important state documents depended largely on the minor officials of his household catching him at favourable moments.² Nevertheless Rudolf would not allow any form of delegation or encroachment on his authority, jealously guarding his prerogative and insisting on taking all important decisions himself.

The Spanish line apart, the principal members of the Habsburg family at that time were Rudolf's three surviving brothers and four cousins, all archdukes. Matthias, as the eldest, was the heir presumptive, a fact which of itself was enough to turn the suspicious emperor against him even had there not been a previous history of dissension. Albrecht was fully occupied with the war in the Netherlands, while the other brother Maximilian was inclined to stay on the sidelines, as did his namesake

Maximilian Ernst, younger brother of Ferdinand of Styria, while the latter's other two brothers, Leopold and Karl Joseph, were still under age. Hence it fell to Matthias and Ferdinand to take the lead on behalf of the family as its problems multiplied.

Matthias was in principle as much a Catholic protagonist as Rudolf, albeit more pragmatic when confronted with formidable opposition, while Ferdinand was an outright militant. Hence it was not so much Rudolf's religious measures as the increasing military threat which occasioned their growing concern. The Turks' renewed offensive, together with Bocskay's hold on Habsburg Hungary, presented a crisis which the emperor appeared to be incapable of addressing, so that they eventually felt obliged to intercede. Twice in 1605 they led a family delegation to Prague, and twice they failed to gain an audience with Rudolf.³ Nevertheless on the second occasion they did succeed in obtaining authority, albeit reluctantly granted, for Matthias to conduct the wars with the Hungarians and the Turks, and to conclude a peace on the emperor's behalf.

It was not an easy task, with Bocskay continuing his advance into Moravia and threatening Austria, while the emperor's forces were demoralised after their retreats and mutinous because of lack of pay. Worse still, there was no money, as none came from rebel-controlled Hungary, and the Protestants in the Estates of Austria were obstructing efforts to raise war taxation. It was clearly going to be all but impossible to inflict a decisive defeat on the Hungarians and to face the Turks at the same time, but in the event a hurriedly assembled army met with enough success against the rebels in the latter part of 1605 to persuade Bocskay to agree to a truce in January 1606.

Matthias then found himself in the unenviable position of having to negotiate with very few cards in his hand. The price of a settlement in Hungary would undoubtedly be major religious concessions to the Protestants, which Rudolf continued to oppose, while Khlesl and the pope both threatened him with eternal damnation should he grant them. On the other hand continuing to fight was scarcely feasible, either militarily or financially. Realism prevailed, and Matthias was fortunate to find the Hungarians wary of too firm a commitment to Bocskay's Transylvania and still warier of an alliance with the Muslim Turks against the Christian emperor. Even so both sides had entrenched positions, and many months of negotiation were required before an agreement was eventually reached in June 1606.

This settlement had three main elements. Firstly Bocskay reaped the reward for his efforts, prising Transylvania and some adjacent territories

away from Habsburg control and establishing them as a principality for himself and his heirs. Secondly the Hungarians, while acknowledging Habsburg sovereignty, insisted that this should be exercised through Matthias rather than Rudolf, only reluctantly relinquishing their original demand that the title of king of Hungary should be transferred to him. Moreover the actual government was to be in the hands of a paladin elected by the Hungarian Estates from their own high nobility, while ethnic Germans and other foreigners were to be excluded both from holding office and from owning lands in Hungary. Thirdly religious freedom was to be guaranteed for the nobility, free cities, market towns with royal charters and for the troops defending the borders. Details were left vague, but this freedom was understood to apply not only to Catholics and Lutherans but also to Calvinists. These religious concessions were the hardest for Matthias to make, but practical politics decided the issue, even Khlesl eventually conceding that 'on the subject of religion we will have to bite into the sour apple'.⁴

Bocskay and the Hungarians were also insistent that peace should be made with the Turks, so that another prolonged negotiation followed, leading to the peace of Zsitva Torok in November 1606. Essentially this confirmed the Turks in possession of all that they had gained, including advances made during the Bocskay rebellion, while the Habsburg side had to be satisfied with mere face-saving concessions, including the commutation of the long-standing annual tribute paid to the sultan in respect of Hungary into a one-off lump sum, together with the latter's agreement to recognise the emperor for the first time as a monarch of equal standing to himself.⁵

Although these two agreements averted the crisis, and the terms were the best obtainable in the circumstances, they were undoubtedly humiliating defeats for the Habsburgs. Bocskay and the Hungarian rebellion had been bought off rather than suppressed, while the Turks had made peace for reasons of their own, including a threat from the Persians in the east, rather than having been repulsed militarily. A breathing space had been gained, but little reliance could be placed on the treaty's twenty-year truce, so that expensive defensive measures would have to be maintained nevertheless. Far from being relieved Rudolf was furious, viewing the outcome in Hungary as a victory for the Protestants and a successful rebellion by the Estates. For this he blamed Matthias, the principal object of his suspicion and antipathy. Although he reluctantly ratified the agreements he set out to undermine them, and before long he was threatening to reopen the wars even though the means to do so were as lacking as before. Thus Matthias, having narrowly averted

the disaster threatening the house of Habsburg, faced the prospect of a renewal of the crisis, as well as being personally exposed to the now overt enmity of his brother the emperor.

Rudolf's increasingly unstable behaviour and his opposition to the prospective settlements had been evident from an early stage during the negotiations with the Hungarians, so that Matthias, needing support, had turned again to the archdukes. A meeting was held in Vienna in April 1606, attended by Matthias and Ferdinand, as well as both Maximilian and Maximilian Ernst, at which they decided to take steps to limit the risk Rudolf presented to the interests and possessions of the Habsburg family. In a carefully worded document they noted that his mental condition was creating severe difficulties for the government, and that as he was unable to rule effectively Matthias was in future to be regarded as head of the House of Austria, while in the interests of ensuring the Habsburg succession to the Imperial crown he was also to be their candidate when the time came. As well as those present, signatures were added on behalf of Ferdinand's two under-age brothers, and Albrecht confirmed his support from the Netherlands later in the year.⁶

For practical purposes the move was a failure, as family unity did not last long. Eighteen months later Ferdinand, probably with an eye to his own chance of securing the succession, was seeking to make his peace with Rudolf, excusing his participation with the claim that Matthias had exaggerated 'Your Majesty's indisposition'.⁷ Maximilian was also ambiguous in his support, while Albrecht had his hands full in the Netherlands, so that Matthias was unable to employ the agreement to achieve any part in the Imperial government or to place any effective constraint on Rudolf. It is however worth repeating here that Rudolf's partisan intervention in the Donauwörth crisis of 1607, described in Chapter 1, occurred in this period, when he was feuding with his family and looking to gain favour and support elsewhere.

The march on Prague, 1608⁸

Unchecked by his family, Rudolf was able to continue planning a new campaign to reverse the concessions in Hungary, despite his lack of means, while seeking to frustrate the treaty with the Turks by not fulfilling his obligations, thus creating renewed tension in both opposing camps. Bocskay had by this time died, so that a struggle for pre-eminence in Transylvania temporarily detached it from the anti-Habsburg front, but the unstable situation in Hungary was further complicated in October 1607 by the rebellion of several thousand

hajduks, landless serfs who had become freelance soldiers and formed the core of Bocskay's forces. Dissatisfied with their treatment after the peace, they directed their anger at the Habsburg government, and with covert Turkish support they were more than a match for the available Imperial troops, most of whom had been demobilised after the treaty, while the remainder were demoralised, widely scattered and in no mood to fight. The Hungarian nobility for their part had found a new leader in the wealthy Protestant magnate Stephan Illéshazy, whose objective was not only to defend but to extend the rights and freedoms which Bocskay had extracted.

It fell to Matthias, by this time formally governor of Hungary as well as of Upper and Lower Austria, to deal with the situation, but as well as these political problems he had to contend with the personal hostility of his brother. This was of long standing, but it became a clear threat when, also in 1607, Rudolf issued a *Liste von Gravamina*, a comprehensive critique of Matthias's stewardship in his territories, and particularly of his concessions to the Hungarians and the Turks in the treaties of 1606.⁹ Some historians have thus interpreted Matthias's conduct in the events which followed as motivated principally by self-defence, whereas others contend that he deliberately used the opportunity thus presented in order to further his personal ambitions.¹⁰ The two possibilities are not mutually exclusive.

What is evident is that Matthias desperately needed support, as he was fighting on two fronts, against both Rudolf and the insurgents, and without the clear backing of the other archdukes the only remaining possibility was the Estates. He turned first, however, not to the Hungarians but to the Austrians, assembling representatives from both Upper and Lower Austria before proceeding with them to a Hungarian assembly in Pressburg (Bratislava) in January 1608. To this highly unconventional joint gathering he presented the conventional request for financial and military support against the Turks, but at the same time he had private contacts with a strong Hungarian faction which had previously wanted to make him king and which was now determined to be rid of Rudolf. This essentially Protestant support met with opposition from the Catholic prelates, who were still represented in the Estates in Austria, together with the Catholic minority among the nobility, while many others were apprehensive about an open challenge to the emperor. It took the strenuous efforts of Matthias himself, supported on the Hungarian side by Illéshazy and among the Austrians by the radically inclined Georg Erasmus Tschernembl, who had become the leading activist in the struggles with Rudolf in the preceding years, to bring these

groups together and to reach an agreement, the essence of which was a joint commitment to defend the treaties of 1606 with the Hungarians and the Turks respectively.

Once again it was Rudolf's own intervention which led to a further escalation, as he issued an edict in February 1608 ordering all concerned to abandon this interference in Imperial affairs, on pain of death and forfeiture of property, while his accompanying private letter to Matthias left the latter in no doubt that he had to act himself in order to forestall action against him. For that he needed soldiers and money. The Hungarian assembly at Pressburg had already voted the raising of both a tax and the militia, and at the end of February Matthias persuaded the Estates of Upper and Lower Austria not only to ratify the agreement but also to vote money and the summoning of their militias. Support from the lands of the Bohemian crown, however, was more difficult to secure.

Moravia was the exception. The most influential man in the territory was the wealthy nobleman Karl Zierotin, a member of the Moravian version of the Calvinist-influenced Brethren and a noted scholar, who had been in correspondence with Illéshazy and Tschernembl throughout the events in Hungary. Like them, he was a protagonist of Protestant and Estates' rights, and an equally determined opponent of Emperor Rudolf II. A more surprising ally for Matthias was the wealthiest Catholic magnate in Moravia, Prince Karl Liechtenstein, a careerist and opportunist who had held high offices under Rudolf but had more than once been dismissed as a victim of the latter's whims. Now he offered to finance the recruiting of professional soldiers for Matthias, and indeed he went further, storming into the Imperial governor's palace with a following of like-minded noblemen and turning him out of office. A hastily summoned meeting of the Moravian Estates in April appointed a new government with Liechtenstein at its head, and this promptly took the territory into the Pressburg alliance.

Events had moved swiftly, as had recruiting, so that by mid-April Matthias had an army, which in the following weeks grew to a reported 15,000 men as contingents from the various territories and noble supporters joined it. As this force started to move into Moravia in the direction of Bohemia, however, the irony of Matthias's position had already become apparent. He was in principle a strong supporter of the Catholic church and of the powers of Habsburg princes over their territories, but he now found himself entirely dependent upon the mainly Protestant nobility who dominated the Estates, the very people who were seeking ever-increasing rights and freedoms, both religious and political, at the

expense of the Catholic church and the house of Habsburg. To retain their support he was obliged to promise concessions, and this inevitably ranged the Catholic hierarchy against him, while even Khlesl retreated into implicitly critical neutrality during these events.

With a confrontation around Prague in the offing it was evident that the attitude of the Bohemians would play a major part in determining the outcome. The presence of Rudolf's court in the city was a valuable asset, while there was also a small but significant Catholic party among the Imperial office-holders in the kingdom. Moreover the Bohemians were inclined to regard themselves as different, habitually taking a highly independent line, an attitude which had long caused tensions with the Estates of the other Bohemian lands, as well as limiting the scope for cooperation in defending their freedoms and privileges against their Habsburg prince. Zierotin had summed up the relationship a couple of years earlier, complaining that the Bohemians 'want to dominate and subjugate us, so that they themselves can be the head and we merely the tail of their kingdom'.¹¹ Moreover initiatives from the other lands were often systematically rejected by the Bohemians, so that support for Matthias originating in Hungary and Austria was as likely to alienate as to attract them.¹² Nevertheless Bohemia had had its own problems with Rudolf, and there had been an uneasy stand-off since 1603, so that when he summoned the Estates in May the large Protestant majority seized the opportunity. Well aware that they had the option of switching their support to Matthias, they agreed to concede nothing to Rudolf until he had accepted their list of demands, which was drawn up by Wenzel Budowetz.

The principal claim was for religious freedom for all on the basis of the Bohemian Confession of 1575, which was to be permanently incorporated into the constitution, together with the establishment of a body of 'defensors' empowered to oversee the rights of the Protestants. The consistory, which supervised the affairs of the authorised confessions outside the Catholic church, then only the neo-Catholic Utraquists, was to pass into Protestant control, as was Prague university. All government offices were in future to be distributed equally between Catholics and Protestants, with non-Bohemians excluded, and the Jesuits were not to be allowed to acquire property without the prior approval of both the king and the Estates. As the final draft was read out and signed by several hundred members of the Estates it is reported that many were heard to say that anyone who later wavered should be thrown out of the window.¹³ The Protestants then sought a personal audience with Rudolf

to present these demands, and rejecting the reclusive emperor's attempt to limit this to a small delegation the entire assembly packed into the reception hall of his palace, where one of the most senior nobles, Count Joachim Andreas Schlick, read the document out to him. Rudolf's reply on the following day was placatory, and during the ensuing discussions he conceded some of the less contentious items, including agreeing to accept the settlement in Hungary and the treaty with the Turks, but little progress was made on the central religious issues.

Meanwhile militia and other recruits were coming in to protect Prague, although most of the former were poorly armed farmers or artisans, who according to a contemporary report usually ran away without even firing as soon as they saw the enemy, while some of their rudimentary weapons training had to be provided by the royal gamekeepers.¹⁴ Nevertheless by the time Matthias's forces reached Prague and halted just outside at Lieben (Libeň) these defenders were in position, and it was evident that the city could not be occupied without a fight. Thus after a short skirmish between the advance guards it was agreed to begin negotiations, which were carried out mainly between representatives of Matthias and of the Estates over the following three weeks. The proximate cause of the confrontation, the emperor's efforts to undermine the treaties of 1606, had effectively been dealt with by the Bohemians, but the determination of Matthias's allies to rid themselves of Rudolf remained. Eventually it was decided that Matthias should retain those territories which had sided with him, becoming king of Hungary and margrave of Moravia as well as ruling prince of Upper and Lower Austria, while Rudolf was to remain king of Bohemia, duke of Silesia and margrave of Upper and Lower Lusatia, as well as emperor. The latter territories also agreed to recognise Matthias as Rudolf's prospective successor. The Bohemians, anxious not to delay the departure of the invading army, agreed despite not having reached a conclusion on their own religious demands from Rudolf, and in the clear expectation that concessions would be forthcoming they accepted reference of these to a further Estates meeting arranged for November. Rudolf himself was left with no choice but to accede to this arrangement, signing the relevant documents on 25 June 1608, while on the same day Matthias formally accepted nomination as his heir in Bohemia. Significantly for later events, Matthias described this as a 'free election' by the Bohemian Estates, guaranteeing them in return all their existing rights and privileges.¹⁵ He then celebrated his success with a banquet at Lieben from which, it is reported, the Bohemian representatives returned to Prague 'well drunk'.¹⁶

Strife in Austria¹⁷

It was not long before the Protestant-dominated Estates of Austria and Moravia presented the bill for their assistance. An indication of what was to follow came immediately before Matthias's allies set out for home from their camp at Sterbohol, just outside Prague. There the representatives of his new territories formed a secret alliance in which they pledged to support each other in defence of their freedom of conscience and religious observances. This was to apply specifically to their dealings with their new prince, from whom guarantees of these freedoms were to be extracted, failing which they would all refuse to take the oath of allegiance.

Their solidarity was short-lived, however, as by August Moravia had reached an accommodation with Matthias, who both here and in Hungary was prepared to concede more than in the core Habsburg lands in Austria. Although on the religious question the Moravians contented themselves with Matthias's formal assurance that no-one would be persecuted because of his confession, they secured a wide range of political limitations on the new margrave, with most practical power passing to an indigenous head of government, a post promptly filled by Zierotin. Explaining why they had gone on to take the oath of allegiance, he wrote to Tschernembl that 'as long as we had no prince the way was open for outsiders to attempt new hostile manoeuvres against us, but now that we are under a legitimate sovereign the court in Prague has no further excuse for intrigues or attacks upon us'.¹⁸

In Austria, with its history of thirty years of struggle against Rudolf's efforts at counter-Reformation, the nobility were prepared to take nothing on trust, and urged on by Tschernembl the two territories agreed to act jointly, and to take the initiative by presenting Matthias with their demands. The essentials of these were firstly that the cities should have the same freedom of religion as the nobility, secondly that all the restrictions which had been imposed during Rudolf's reign on the original concessions made by Maximilian II should be removed, and thirdly that high offices in Upper and Lower Austria respectively should be filled only by those actually born and resident there. In Upper Austria they went further, preparing to defend themselves if necessary by summoning the militia and commencing troop recruitment even before the joint demands were presented to Matthias at the Estates in Vienna in September 1608. He responded with vague assurances and attempts to play for time, maintaining that the oath of allegiance should come first and that these demands could then be

considered in the normal way. After two days the Protestant nobility walked out, reassembling shortly afterwards in the small town of Horn, where they formed the Horn alliance, while the Lower Austrians followed their neighbours in setting about raising taxes and troops.

Matthias's initial response was bold. In mid-October he received the oath of allegiance from the bishops and Catholic members of the nobility in Lower Austria, together with the cities, while he too began recruiting soldiers. He was also able to detach a second of the Sterbohol confederates, Hungary, albeit by making religious and political concessions, and he secured the oath of allegiance and was crowned king in mid-November. Meanwhile the Protestant Austrian nobility stood their ground, and eventually, in early January 1609, Matthias set a fourteen-day deadline for them to make their submission. Behind this confrontational stance, however, both sides were conscious of their weakness and lack of wider support. The newly formed Protestant Union in Germany offered their co-religionists sympathy but no practical help, while Christian of Anhalt had pursued a number of imaginative schemes involving such unlikely potential allies as Rudolf himself, but to no avail. Meanwhile Khlesl's efforts on behalf of Matthias had fared no better. Rudolf was not inclined to lend any form of assistance to his brother, Maximilian of Bavaria was not to be diverted from his efforts to form the Catholic League in Germany, and even the Catholic prelates in Austria were looking for a settlement rather than an escalation of the dispute.

Hence the opposing parties found themselves obliged to accept when the Moravians, led by the peacefully inclined Zierotin, offered to act as mediators. A compromise was reached over the future filling of high offices, while Matthias accepted the withdrawal of Rudolf's restrictions on Maximilian II's religious concessions to the nobility. The question of giving the same rights to the cities was fought to the last, with Khlesl bitterly opposed, but Matthias's secular advisers prevailed and the Protestants secured much, although not all, of what they sought. By this stage both sides recognised that they had achieved as much as was obtainable without resort to arms, and an agreement was finally concluded in March 1609. No-one was satisfied, with Matthias, Khlesl and the Catholic party hoping for a later opportunity to claw back what had been conceded, while the Protestant militants regarded the settlement only as the basis for further demands in the future.

The Letter of Majesty, 1609¹⁹

In Bohemia the demands of the Protestants had been staved off by their reference to an Estates meeting promised for November 1608, but this did not in fact meet until 28 January 1609, when a much larger number of members than usual presented themselves. Two weeks passed with little progress, during which the emperor's advisers argued among themselves as to what concessions might be made, the hardest line being taken by the chancellor, Zdeněk Lobkowitz, together with Wilhelm Slavata and Jaroslav Martinitz. Rudolf's eventual response was uncompromising, stressing that the only permitted confessions were the Catholic church and the neo-Catholic Utraquists, while the Bohemian Brethren in particular was and remained forbidden, and he went on to demand the expulsion of 'heretical' preachers.

During the remainder of February and all through March a series of confrontational documents went backwards and forwards between the Protestant-dominated Estates and the emperor and his councillors. In these the former presented both reasoned arguments to support their demands and polemical statements of their grievances, illustrated by many reported injustices to Protestants in Bohemia, while the latter countered with reiterations of the emperor's unyielding position and instructions to the Estates to move on to its other normal business. Within Rudolf's council the hardliners, although a minority, continued to hold sway with their argument that any concession to the Lutherans would inevitably open the door for the Bohemian Brethren, while the latter, with Budowetz to the fore, became increasingly influential among the Estates as the efforts of the more moderate leadership demonstrably failed to achieve any progress. On 31 March Rudolf, flanked by his officials, met a delegation, telling them firmly that he did not intend to change his mind on the religious question, while one of the most senior Catholic Bohemian office-holders, Adam Sternberg, privately informed the delegates that if the Estates did not proceed to its other business on the following day he had instructions to prorogue it. This he duly did when on the next morning Budowetz merely read out a long letter refusing on behalf of the Protestants to move on while the religious issues remained unresolved.

The Protestant members of the Estates had already agreed to respond with action rather than talk, calling their own meeting in the city hall of the Prague New Town for 4 May 1609, while in the interim they sought support from their compatriots, as well as from Matthias, the

three Protestant electors and the Estates of Silesia and Lusatia. Rudolf's order forbidding the proposed assembly was ignored, while his attempts to detach more moderate members from the militants were equally unavailing. On the due date the Protestants assembled first at Prague castle, meeting in the open air as the rooms had been barred against them, where they elected Budowetz as their spokesman in place of the more moderate Schlick, who had previously served in this capacity. Twice Rudolf received delegations, but on each occasion he merely confirmed his prohibition of the assembly, offering instead to call a new Estates meeting but refusing to specify any date.

With no compromise in sight it was time for the Estates to open their meeting in the city hall. As the members streamed down from the castle and across the river bridge a large crowd of sympathetic townsmen gathered around them, but as they reached the hall an Imperial official attempted to read out an order forbidding the assembly. He was hooted and whistled down, but frayed nerves and volatile tempers were evident three days later, when a messenger came to warn the delegates that Imperial troops were assembling to attack them. In fact it was only a guard of honour meeting a Spanish ambassador, but panic ensued as members, many of them already heavily armed as though in a military camp rather than at a committee meeting, rushed to get out into the street in order to defend themselves. The large number of retainers they had brought with them were quickly assembled, joined by many hotheads from the city with whatever weapons they could lay hands on, until eventually an Imperial messenger arrived with assurances that no attack was planned. It was in this mood that a large armed crowd gathered again in the New Town the following morning, while the leaders prepared to submit a new document to Rudolf. Six delegates were selected to go to the castle, led by Budowetz, but when they did not return angry rumours that they had been arrested spread quickly, only stilled by their final reappearance late in the evening.

The document itself was carefully drafted by Prague's leading lawyers, and it began by declaring the Estates' loyalty and goodwill towards Rudolf as their king. They intended, they claimed, nothing detrimental to his standing or authority, noting that they had only been driven to holding their own assembly by the unjustified termination of the Estates meeting before the religious issue had been resolved. Their sole wish was to obtain peaceably the freedom to exercise their religion, and to this end they requested that a new Estates meeting be held immediately, adding that all those entitled to attend were already in Prague.

Meanwhile the emissaries despatched to the electors and to the Estates of the other lands of the Bohemian crown had elicited polite but mainly non-committal responses. Most help came from the elector of Saxony, who sought to mediate in this difficult situation by sending no less a person than his own chancellor to intercede with Rudolf. In accordance with his family's traditional policy towards the Empire, the elector's objective was to counterbalance the influence of the Catholic party at Rudolf's court, and to steer the emperor towards the position of the more moderate group among the Protestants.²⁰ Adopting the tone of a concerned friend, he advised the emperor to seek an accommodation with the Estates, just at the time when the majority of Rudolf's own advisers were doing the same. Lobkowitz, Martinitz and Slavata still held to their hard line, but they were isolated, and although Rudolf was personally of the same inclination he eventually gave way. On 14 May negotiations began, not over the substance of the demands but over the calling of a new Estates meeting. Rudolf reluctantly agreed to this but sought a postponement, successively reducing the delay under pressure until in the end he gave way, but it took ten days before agreement was reached.

The Estates meeting opened on 25 May, but it soon became clear that Rudolf had no intention of changing his position. His opening statement noted that the religious issue was to be discussed but made no proposals or response to the many previous Protestant submissions, instead dwelling on the other standard business matters, principally taxation, which he planned to put forward. The Prague lawyers got to work again, and on 29 May a deputation handed in yet another document, restating the demand for religious freedom and claiming the consistory and the university for the Protestants. Tempers began to fray again, and there were bitter exchanges with Rudolf's Catholic officials, while he himself remained closeted, seeing only his principal advisers. Eventually he issued a statement to the effect that he had not changed his mind, that the religious status quo should prevail as it had been under Emperor Ferdinand I, and that the Estates should now proceed to his other business.

After four months of argument the Protestants were no further forward than they had been at the outset, and Count Matthias Thurn doubtless spoke for many in saying that there had been enough words wasted, that it was now time for action, and that they should set about arming themselves. Once more the lawyers started work on a reply, but this time its tone was quite different and its style was clearly intended for a wider audience than Rudolf alone. They were no longer prepared, the Estates declared, to be refused their religious freedom, and as argument

was exhausted they were preparing to defend themselves against anyone who attempted to deny it to them. To this challenging assertion they attached a complete draft law, requiring only the king's signature to give effect to their full demands, a document which with only the smallest of alterations eventually became the famous Letter of Majesty. They then began making preparations. A provisional list of directors and generals was drawn up, plans were made to call up every fifth man into the militia, and a tax on land and capital, to be paid in two stages, was proposed. The latter caused some concern among the wealthier members of the Estates, but they were outvoted by their more numerous less well-heeled colleagues.²¹

It appears that a combination of pressure from Saxony, indications of help from Moravia and Silesia for the Estates, and the latter's own preparations for armed action, had a significant effect on Rudolf, as on 24 June he agreed to Saxon mediation. His resulting new proposals went much further than before, although by no means meeting the Protestant demands in full, particularly over the consistory and the university. Although some of the Protestants were by now ready to accept the offered terms those prepared to fight on prevailed, and the Saxons were sent back to seek improvements. Rudolf's quick reply was angrily received, as it reduced the concessions already made, thus undermining the position of the compromise-minded members of the Estates and leaving the way clear for the militants.

Events now moved swiftly. A previously prepared document was promptly published, enumerating the grievances of the Protestants in polemical style, asserting that the intention of the Estates was only self-defence, and calling for the assembly of the militia and the raising of money for the struggle. Thirty directors were appointed, ten from each Estate, that is lords, knights and cities, while the salaries of these appointees were also carefully provided for, the nobles at a level some three times that of the city representatives. Thurn was to head the military leadership as lieutenant-general, with Leonhard Colonna Fels as field marshal (then a lower rank) and Johann Bubna as quartermaster-general. Late at night on 26 June, this work completed, the Protestant members of the Estates took an oath of solidarity, dissolved their meeting and departed for home, while the directors set to work establishing what was in effect a provisional government in the Prague Old Town city hall.²² Military considerations came first, with an appeal to Christian of Anhalt to send help and supplies, while Thurn began recruiting urgently in order to provide the directorate with both protection and a means of control in the city. A target was set of 3000 infantry and 1500 cavalry,

and it is reported that Thurn already had 500 men after three days and was nearing his complement inside a week.

Most of the emperor's advisers were pressing him to make further concessions, and they persuaded him to authorise Sternberg to re-open negotiations. On 30 June the latter met a group of the directors led by Budowetz, where one of the most significant points arising was the possibility that if the Protestants obtained all their demands they would be in a position to oppress the Catholics rather than vice versa. The negotiators went back and forth for most of the next week, during which this objection was dealt with by drafting a separate agreement between the Protestant and Catholic members of the Estates, while Rudolf was gradually forced to give ground and to concede almost all the remaining points. He eventually signed the Letter of Majesty on 9 July 1609, although Lobkowitz firmly refused to add his own signature as chancellor, so that Sternberg had to sign in his place. The members of the Estates were then quickly summoned back to Prague, so that the meeting could reconvene and formally incorporate the Letter and the accompanying agreement into the law of the land. In a separate document a few weeks later Rudolf also conceded to the new defensors the important right to meet freely and to present a complaint whenever Protestant rights appeared to have been infringed, and a short while later, on 20 August, he also had to issue a similar Letter of Majesty for Silesia.²³

These events have been seen as a virtual dress rehearsal for the revolt of 1618, and many of the leading figures did indeed reappear in similar roles at that time, while the settlement itself contained the seeds of the future disputes leading up to the defenestration. The Letter of Majesty granted all the principal demands of the Protestant Estates, guaranteeing that no-one, of whatever status, was to be obliged by any overlord to change his religion, and according equal rights to Catholics and adherents of the Bohemian Confession of 1575, although this definition left the position of the Bohemian Brethren at best uncertain. Moreover the Letter was less than precise about the situation of those of one confession living in the jurisdiction of a lord of another persuasion, in that their rights to actually exercise their religion by attending or building churches and appointing their own ministers were more implicit than explicit, an aspect which was soon to give rise to further disputes.²⁴ There was also one noteworthy difference between the Letter of Majesty and the parallel agreement between the Catholic and Protestant factions in the Estates signed on the same day, namely that the provision concerning freedom of religion for the peasants in the former document was

not included in the latter, a telling reflection of the nobility's determination to secure rights for themselves but to avoid concessions to their own vassals.²⁵

With an eye on 1618 it is also worth noting here that although the Bohemians had appealed for support to both Christian of Anhalt and the Estates of the other lands of the Bohemian crown at the height of their confrontation with Rudolf, once they had secured the Letter of Majesty they quickly reverted to their independent stance. Christian had arrived in Prague during the crisis with a proposal that the Bohemians and Silesians should unite with the Estates in Matthias's Austrian lands, and then all affiliate to the Protestant Union in order to form a powerful Protestant bloc in central Europe. With the Letter in their hands, however, the Bohemians felt their position sufficiently secured and declined to participate, although informal contacts continued between the others and the Union. Zierotin was no more successful with his efforts to unite the Estates of the Habsburg lands during the summer and autumn of 1609, complaining bitterly in November that Budowetz, Thurn and other leading Bohemians responded to his proposals only with evasions and excuses.²⁶

The Passau army, 1611

Rudolf never gave up hope of recovering his lands and titles from his brother, but for this he needed help. Matthias's continuing friction with his Estates suggested one possibility, while Rudolf also looked optimistically towards Spain and the papacy, but in the event none of these offered him any practical assistance. Hence he was more than willing to respond to the efforts of his cousin Leopold, a younger brother of Ferdinand of Styria, to win his favour. Although only 23 in 1609, Leopold had already been bishop of both Passau and Strasbourg for several years, but his inclinations were not religious, while his worldly ambitions aimed much higher. His chance to make his mark came, or so he thought, as the dispute over the Cleves-Jülich inheritance flared up following the death of the duke in March 1609. That conflict has been described in Chapters 1 and 2, where it was also noted that it occurred at the lowest point so far in Rudolf's fortunes, after he had been humiliated by Matthias a year earlier and was facing a further defeat at the hands of the Bohemian Estates. Thus his ill-considered interventions in Cleves-Jülich in his capacity as emperor can be seen as attempts to reassert himself at the centre of affairs, as well as to win favour with influential potential supporters, notably the elector of Saxony.

Rudolf initially appointed Leopold to take possession of the Cleves-Jülich duchies on his behalf pending a formal adjudication between the claimants, but although the commandant of the Jülich citadel accepted Imperial jurisdiction the other parties did not, so that in mid-1609 Leopold found himself impotently penned in with the garrison while events developed outside without him. Eventually he slipped away, but he was eager to try again, and in January 1610 Rudolf issued him with a patent to recruit troops in order to enforce his authority in Jülich. This Leopold quickly did, raising forces in both his bishoprics, although only those from Strasbourg actually became involved in the conflict, skirmishing briefly and ineffectively on the sidelines in Alsace. The small army which was mustered in Passau by April, two regiments of infantry and two of cavalry, an official complement of around 8000 men, did nothing at all.²⁷ Some indeed have suspected that this latter force was never intended for deployment in Cleves-Jülich, which lies at almost the furthest point in Germany from Passau. Prague, on the other hand, is little over a hundred miles away, while Matthias's Austrian provinces were just across the border.²⁸

News of Leopold's recruiting in Passau reached the Austrians in March 1610, and Matthias reacted swiftly to the potential threat, summoning representatives from the Estates of Hungary, Moravia and Austria to make preparations to defend the gains they had made two years previously. Even before that these territories had started to mobilise their militias and to recruit professional soldiers, their differences with Matthias taking second place to this new danger from Rudolf and Leopold, and by the late summer they were well prepared to defend Austria. In Bohemia too the Protestants were alarmed, and although they did not respond as quickly they too eventually started recruiting.

Rudolf also hoped to obtain support from a conference of Catholic and moderate Lutheran princes which he called in Prague in May 1610, and there are reports that he took this opportunity to lobby the Catholic and Saxon electors on behalf of Leopold as a candidate in a future election of a king of the Romans, that is as his own prospective successor as emperor.²⁹ Of more immediate importance was the situation in Cleves-Jülich, which was then at a critical stage, so that while Rudolf met with some sympathy from the Catholics for his complaint that his lands had been taken forcibly from him, none were prepared to contemplate military action to recover them. Instead they advised negotiation, and as Matthias expressed himself willing Rudolf had little choice but to concur. The resulting mediation led to an agreement, concluded in late September, under which both sides were to withdraw their troops from

the Austrian borders and set about demobilisation. Duke Heinrich Julius of Brunswick was commissioned to oversee the discharge of the Passau troops, but while Rudolf gave him the relevant authority he furnished none of the necessary money, without which the men could not be paid their arrears and dismissed.³⁰

Rudolf's real intentions during the autumn of 1610 are hard to fathom, if indeed he knew them himself. Reclusive and indecisive anyway, the contradictions both within his letters and between his statements and his actions, or more precisely inaction, may have reflected no more than his state of mind. On the other hand they may have concealed more sinister intentions, such as the wish to retain his own troops until after Matthias had discharged his. It is also unclear how far Leopold was acting in accordance with, or despite, Rudolf's private instructions, and it has been suggested that while the latter's consuming interest remained the recovery of his Austrian lands, Leopold himself was aiming to invade Bohemia in order to suppress the Estates and to establish his own position as successor king.³¹ It is not even clear to what extent Leopold was actually in control of his Passau army as the crisis developed.

The looming problem was quickly evident to others. The army, not only the soldiers but large numbers of wives, children and other camp followers, had exhausted the resources of the small territory of Passau over the summer, so that they were not only unpaid but already hungry before the autumn. In mid-September Rudolf's Imperial military council advised him that they would have to be moved to winter quarters in Bohemia until money could be found to pay them off, a prospect which horrified his Bohemian officials. Aware of the risk that as the condition of the army deteriorated it might decide to move on its own initiative to find food, in October they began to prepare defences, particularly around the southern cities, and in November they called up local militias and stationed them on the main access roads into Bohemia. Meanwhile Heinrich Julius of Brunswick was in Passau trying to placate the restive troops, despite previous un-kept promises about their pay, and on 9 December he persuaded them to wait another week while he went back to Prague to seek funds, but there he met with nothing but evasions.

On 22 December the army, commanded by a certain Colonel Ramé, broke camp, although on whose orders is not known. The troops first marched into Upper Austria south of the Danube, where there were no opposing forces, but finding the passes further south defended, or so he later claimed, Ramé then moved northwards into prosperous

country which could feed his men, and which was also closer to the Bohemian border in case of an attack from Lower Austria. In Bohemia there were demands for renewed recruitment, but these were fobbed off by Rudolf and his officials, leading many to believe that he was deliberately seeking to keep them defenceless against his Passau army.

Rudolf was finally persuaded to summon the Estates, which met on 28 January 1611. Prague was full of rumours that Leopold was urging the emperor to arrest the leaders of the Estates, and that an attempt was to be made to seize their military commanders, Thurn, Fels and Wilhelm Lobkowitz. On the other side there were reports of threats to the less militant members of the Estates that they risked being thrown out of the window, a recurrent theme in times of stress in Bohemia.³² At the Estates meeting Rudolf continued to delay action. Leopold's troops presented no threat, he said, as they were only being retained until Matthias confirmed that he had no hostile intentions, and until there was money available to pay them off. Further recruitment would only add unnecessary expense. He was still giving assurances when information arrived that Ramé had actually crossed into Bohemia.

Ramé swiftly took Budweis (České Budějovice), writing from there on 31 January to assure the Bohemians that he had only moved into the territory because of his men's need, because the passes into the Tyrol were defended against him, and because he had received information that the Estates were secretly recruiting with intentions against the emperor and his own force.³³ Rudolf in turn sent a message to the Estates that Ramé had moved into Bohemia against his orders, and he asked for help to provide the money to pay off the troops. Instead the Estates resolved to recruit two regiments, one of infantry and one of cavalry, thereby doubling their forces to 6000 men, and they voted a tax to pay for this. Belatedly they secured Rudolf's agreement to these measures, to the release of weapons from the arsenal, and to calling up the militia, every tenth man from the countryside and every eighth from the cities, all of whom were to make for Prague as fast as they could. Appeals for help were also sent to the other Bohemian lands and to Saxony, while Rudolf continued to make contradictory statements about wanting to pay off the Passau troops and to keep them for his own protection.

On 13 February the Passau army reached the outskirts of Prague, and on the 15th Ramé made a surprise attack and occupied the Malá Strana, the confusingly named Lesser Town, which stands below the castle on the left bank of the river, opposite the Old Town across the Charles Bridge. Thurn, who was wounded in the fighting, and many of the

Estates troops, commanded by Fels and Wilhelm Lobkowitz, retreated to the castle, while others led by Wilhelm Kinsky successfully defended the Old Town against an attack over the bridge. Ramé then mounted an assault on the castle but was driven off, at which point Rudolf sent out heralds calling for a three-hour truce, during which it was arranged that the Passau troops would quarter themselves in the Lesser Town while the Estates forces withdrew to the other side of the river. Leopold is reported to have paraded through the Lesser Town acclaiming himself as the victor, firing off his pistol and boasting that Rudolf had appointed him commander-in-chief.³⁴

The available members of the Estates reassembled in the Old Town city hall on the same day, a potentially revolutionary gathering as it was on their own initiative, without king or officers, and led by Kinsky they refused to accept the cease-fire. They then moved rapidly to strengthen their defences and to send out calls for militia from around the country to hurry to their assistance. The Catholic party were still in the castle, as were some Protestant members of the Estates, including Thurn, Fels and Wilhelm Lobkowitz, who were now effectively prisoners, while their remaining troops were conscripted into Leopold's army.

Negotiations took place a few days later, but the Estates were not prepared to admit the Passau troops to the Old Town. Meanwhile Ramé was busy mounting cannon, and on the breakdown of the talks he was ready to begin bombarding the city. Rudolf, however, refused to give the order, motivated, it is thought, both by personal horror at military conflict in close proximity to his person, and by fear that all the Catholics in the city might be killed as soon as an attack started, a fate which had already befallen a number of Franciscan monks during the first day of fighting.

Several more days of negotiation followed, during which the Estates, guided by Kinsky, took a hard line, repeatedly delaying or finding new issues such as compensation for the damage to the city, thus drawing out the discussions to avoid a conclusion while help was approaching. On 23 February a considerable number of the nobility, together with their armed retainers, reached the Old Town to strengthen the Estates forces, Wenzel Budowetz among them, while in an attempt to persuade the Estates to give way the Catholic party ill-advisedly sent Thurn, Fels and Wilhelm Lobkowitz to join the negotiations, but none of them returned. Rudolf's increasingly obvious indecision helped to strengthen the resistance, and there were rumours that he was considering a personal withdrawal to Budweis. Meanwhile the loyalty of the garrison in the castle was causing his supporters concern, reports were

coming in that Matthias's forces were advancing towards Bohemia, and day by day more men were reaching the Old Town to strengthen its defences.

With their military position much improved, the Estates moved to organise themselves politically. On 28 February they elected thirty directors, ten from each estate, the lords, knights and cities, together with Thurn and Fels as the army commanders. Among them were Kinsky and Wilhelm Lobkowitz, as well as a number of others who had been involved in 1609 or would be again in 1618.³⁵ This directorate promptly published an *Apologia* justifying their actions, all of which, they claimed, were done loyally in the name of the emperor and in self-defence against the Passau army.

It was not much longer before the Passau position began to collapse. On 4 March Leopold despatched his secretary on a diplomatic mission to Germany, but he was observed slipping out of Prague, Kinsky went after him with a troop of cavalry, and he was captured and brought back. Under interrogation he revealed damaging details of Leopold's ambitions and plans, which together with further news of Matthias's advance caused panic in Prague castle. Leopold frantically sent a messenger to the Estates on 6 March, claiming to be young, inexperienced in military matters, and led astray by bad advice, concluding with a request for a safe conduct out of Prague so that he could go to Matthias to seek his pardon.³⁶

By now Ramé had been cooling his heels for most of three weeks in the Lesser Town, while his still unpaid men grew increasingly restive, the citizenry grew increasingly hostile because of their depredations, and the opposing forces on the other side of the river grew steadily larger. His troops were clearly in no mood to fight, and there were fears that they might arrest their officers and defect to the Estates instead. On 6 March Matthias's army, reportedly 8000 strong, reached the outskirts of Prague, while Thurn and Fels began debating using their own increased strength to attack the Lesser Town.³⁷ Ramé beat them to it, slipping away with his men on the night of 10 March, prudently covering his retreat with a rearguard and destroying bridges behind him as he went. He also took a circuitous route, thereby foiling a belated attempt to intercept him, so that he arrived safely at Budweis and fortified it against attack. It is worth adding that although the Passau army has passed into history as an odious rabble because of the ruthless looting carried out by the hungry troops and their dependents, they nevertheless performed their military functions effectively, while Ramé appears to have been a competent officer. Back in Prague Thurn promptly took a troop of cavalry

to the castle to demand its surrender, following which Rudolf became a virtual prisoner.

Matthias himself had carefully avoided setting foot in Bohemia while he sought diplomatic cover for his decidedly delicate position. He had written to the Bohemians saying that he was sending troops to the aid of the loyal Estates, while telling Rudolf that as a loyal brother he could not stand by while he, the emperor, was molested in his own castle by the Passau army. To both he claimed that he was acting in accordance with his duty as designated successor to the crown, while for good measure he went on to complain to Rudolf that he had broken the terms of their agreement, thus giving him the right to intervene. Nevertheless as his troops advanced into Bohemia Matthias went no further than a town on the Moravian border, where he waited.

With Ramé gone and with Matthias's army at their gates, the Estates issued a formal invitation to Matthias to come to Prague, but they imposed conditions, asking him to give assurances before crossing the border that he would respect all their rights and privileges. A week of mutually mistrustful diplomatic exchanges followed, Matthias at one stage disingenuously enquiring what the Estates wanted of him in Prague, while they avoided a direct reply. Both sides knew that they wanted to replace Rudolf with Matthias as king of Bohemia, but on quite different terms, while the very subject of displacing a king was fraught with difficulties. However Zúñiga, the Spanish ambassador, went to meet Matthias, and it appears that he assured him of his master's support, while eventually Rudolf himself wrote saying that although Matthias had been invited into Bohemia without his knowledge he was welcome, as he was sure he would come as a true friend and brother. Hence on 24 March Matthias finally made his entry into Prague. A guard of honour under Thurn and Fels rode out to escort him to the city, on the outskirts of which he was welcomed first on behalf of the Estates and then on behalf of the citizens, before riding in during the early evening on a horse draped in scarlet, to the cheers of the crowd.³⁸

As no-one was sure how to go about displacing Rudolf it was clearly preferable to persuade him to abdicate, but even at this stage he was not ready to do so. Zúñiga and Heinrich Julius of Brunswick both saw that his position was hopeless, and they sought to persuade him to do as many of his predecessors had done and authorise the election of a new king of Bohemia during his own lifetime, thus providing himself with a dignified means of withdrawal. Eventually Rudolf agreed to call a general assembly of the Estates of all the lands of the Bohemian crown, signing the summons on 28 March and calling the meeting for 11 April.

There the succession was finally resolved, and Matthias was crowned king of Bohemia on 28 May 1611.

Embarrassingly though, Rudolf was still emperor, a problem which the electors pondered at a meeting in Nuremberg in October 1611. There was no procedure or precedent for such a situation, but it was decided at least to proceed with the election of a king of the Romans, thus effectively designating a successor. This was to take place in May 1612, but the 59-year-old Rudolf did not live that long, dying in Prague on 20 January of that year. Preparations were being made for a wedding as the news reached Matthias's court in Vienna, as he had decided to marry for the first time, despite his age, and according to the contemporary chronicler Khevenhüller, 'the intended pleasures were changed into mourning dress, but not into heartfelt sorrow'.³⁹

6

Matthias's Reign, Ferdinand's Succession

Matthias's early years, 1612 to 1616

'Emperor Matthias', begins his biographer disparagingly, 'is historically important for one thing, and one thing only, namely that the notorious defenestration of Prague took place during his reign.'¹ Such obvious hyperbole need not, of course, be taken too literally, but few have disagreed with the underlying assessment of Matthias's character. The best most say of him is that for a Habsburg he was unusually personable and approachable, without the Spanish-style aloofness of his elder brothers, although they quickly add that this easy-going exterior accurately reflected the essential superficiality of his nature. His ambitions, it is said, were for position and status rather than for power and authority, and his principal concern was with outward show rather than the substance of his offices. Nor was he inclined to involve himself in the work which went with his role, whether through laziness or lack of interest, and often he did not deal with even the most important documents, sending letters from princes unopened to Khlesl in Vienna, so that the latter often chided him for his lack of effort: 'Everyone knows that Your Majesty asks about nothing and lets everything go just as it will.'²

Matthias's saving grace may well have been his choice of his principal adviser. Khlesl first came to his attention in Austria around 1598, quickly becoming first influential and then indispensable during the following twenty years. They were in a sense complementary, in that Khlesl had the very qualities which Matthias most lacked. A self-made man from modest origins, he was penetratingly intelligent, clear-sighted, hard-working, and sharply focussed on his objectives, as well as being, according to his enemies, devious and Machiavellian. Above all he was totally committed to two interests, those of the Catholic church and

of Matthias, problems only arising when these appeared in danger of conflicting. His importance for Matthias's career cannot be overstated, another biographer contending that he was 'the significant adviser who propelled his insignificant master into a historic role'.³

Even Matthias's religious outlook stemmed largely from Khlesl, it has been suggested. Unlike his elder brothers, Matthias was not sent to Spain as a youth, being brought up instead mainly at the German court of his father, Emperor Maximilian II, under whose influence he developed a leaning towards Lutheran books and practices, while his youthful escapades during the early years of Rudolf's reign gave rise to family and papal fears that he might become a Protestant. It was only after he had formed a close association with Khlesl that Matthias turned to conventional Catholicism and became a protagonist of counter-Reformation.⁴

Khlesl, on the other hand, became more pragmatic in his later years, holding to his beliefs but moderating his tactics to accommodate the needs of practical politics as the emperor's principal minister. 'I too', he wrote, 'was once hot-headed in pursuing theological objectives, but anyone in the emperor's service today must approach matters quite differently in order to keep affairs of state in equilibrium. Theology calls for many actions which are not viable in politics.'⁵ By the time of Matthias's accession Khlesl had recognised that the old Catholic objective, maintained since the first years after the Reformation, of reuniting the confessions, was no longer achievable. Hence as the only alternative to a political accommodation would ultimately be a religious war, he viewed reaching an understanding with the Protestant princes as an obligatory duty.⁶

Rather than Matthias's reign being important only because of the defenestration, it is possible to argue almost the opposite, that but for the defenestration it might well have been important. Thus Wilson notes that 'Matthias's succession in 1612 saw many problems being tackled with considerable success' so that by 1618 'some confidence had been restored in the Habsburgs and there was little to suggest that the Empire was on the brink of catastrophe. However the period of recovery was too short to make up the ground that had been lost.'⁷ Parker likewise observes that 'to make Bohemia's Letter of Majesty similarly immutable and respectable [to the Magna Carta and other great political concessions of European history] required only time', but time ran out with the defenestration.⁸

The limited but nevertheless real progress made in the Empire in response to Matthias's and Khlesl's more conciliatory policy has been

noted in Chapter 2, and after the crises and confrontations of Rudolf's last decade the first five years of Matthias's reign, from 1612 to 1616, were also markedly less traumatic in the Habsburg lands. Even though there was neither war nor open internal conflict, however, the religious and political struggle continued unabated, albeit on a smaller scale. Ritter summed it up:

Both sides attempted to achieve gradually at the lower levels what they had been unable to win outright at the top. In numerous small disputes the emperor sought to restore and increase the power of the princes and the Catholic church, which had been severely diminished in the recent upheavals, while for their part the Protestants strove to consolidate and extend the position of their confession, and to build up the authority of the Estates.⁹

Historians often skip quickly over this period, so that the dramatic flare-up in Bohemia in 1618 can seem a disconnected and startling throwback to the earlier turbulence after a period of relative calm, whereas in fact it followed logically from a steady increase in tension, but in the Habsburg lands rather than in the Empire, during these years.

Matthias's accession was itself not a foregone conclusion, despite his position as the heir apparent and with the Habsburg family compact to support him. There were some in the Empire who saw a potential opportunity to displace the Habsburgs, perhaps even by a Protestant, and others, including Habsburg supporters, who would have preferred Archduke Albrecht from the Netherlands. Matthias's role in the step-by-step usurpation of Rudolf's authority and titles was also held against him in some quarters, and under Khlesl's tutelage he had to make considerable diplomatic efforts to win back support. Ultimately, however, there was no other credible and willing candidate, so Matthias was duly elected. Nevertheless the search for an alternative continued, focusing instead on the prospective succession to the ageing and childless new emperor.

Meanwhile the Protestant estates in the various Habsburg lands quickly reverted to their preoccupation with their own internal affairs, rather than seeking to maintain a common front towards their Catholic princes. Joint action had been limited enough even at the critical moments during Rudolf's latter years, and although it had been effective at the time of Matthias's march on Prague in 1608 the Bohemians had nevertheless held back to pursue their own objectives, while Silesia and Lusatia had taken no active part. Moreover, although the participants

had formed the Sterbohol alliance against Matthias immediately after their success, this had quickly fallen apart, with first the Moravians and then the Hungarians agreeing their own terms with him and leaving the Austrians to fend for themselves. During the confrontation of 1609 which led eventually to the Letter of Majesty the Bohemians received little more than polite messages of support from their co-religionists in the other Habsburg lands, and although the Austrians, Hungarians and Moravians joined Matthias's army to meet the danger from the Passau invaders in 1611 the Silesians and Lusatians again made no practical moves to help. With Rudolf gone and the immediate threat removed, parochial interests and long-standing rivalries among the territories reasserted themselves. Leading individuals such as Tschernembl in Austria and Zierotin in Moravia continued to see the need for unity, and to maintain contacts both among themselves and with potential allies in the Empire, notably Christian of Anhalt, but the failure to establish any effective links with the Protestant Union is a more telling indicator of wider sentiment.

One clear reason why the majority saw no overriding need to form a united front was the weakened state in which the confrontations of Rudolf's last decade had left the Habsburg monarchy. Matthias himself provided one of the best assessments of the situation in a letter he wrote to Archduke Ferdinand of Styria in November 1613, pessimistically enumerating the problems province by province. These might be contained during his lifetime, he thought, but after his death crisis and collapse might well follow. In Upper and Lower Austria he had up to now, by showing the greatest flexibility and willingness to make concessions, avoided an open uprising, but the Estates were only looking for an opportunity to free themselves from his lordship, and they were conspiring with the Hungarians and with the Protestant Union in Germany. In Hungary he was completely powerless, as the paladin, the head of the government, did as he pleased and took no notice of his own orders or prohibitions. The Hungarians too were aiming to depose the House of Habsburg, which the paladin himself had openly declared, and he was allying himself with the nobility in preparation for seizing the crown either for himself or for his successor. As for Bohemia, he could not summon the Estates unless he allowed a joint meeting of the Estates of all the Habsburg lands (which he had been obliged to promise the Bohemians before becoming king in 1611), but without summoning them he could raise no taxes from the province. In Silesia the leading noble, the margrave of Jägerndorf, was agitating furiously against the Habsburgs, while in Moravia the situation was similar to Hungary.

Zierotin ruled the land as though he were himself its prince, but his own orders carried no weight unless he were prepared to accept all kinds of conditions for having them carried out.¹⁰

Even so Matthias was able to benefit from the divisions among his subjects, which were well illustrated when he finally called the promised full joint meeting in Prague in June 1615. The original idea of the Bohemian Protestants in 1611, with the dangerous episode of the Passau army fresh in mind, had been to use the meeting to formalise a confederation of the Habsburg lands, and thus to provide for mutual defence of their religious and political privileges against their overlord. Four years later this no longer seemed urgent enough to bring about the necessary compromises between territories more jealous of their independence than they were afraid of princely power. The Hungarians did not attend at all, while the Moravians, Silesians and Lusatians exhibited their traditional antipathy to what they saw as Bohemian ambitions to secure the leading role, and the Austrians too kept their distance. Meanwhile Matthias and Khlesl sought to limit any joint venture to military cooperation directed against external enemies, particularly the Turks, and they were probably more relieved than disappointed when the meeting broke up after two months of wrangling without achieving anything.¹¹

One other division, the social division, was also to play a part in the course of the Bohemian revolt. The practical politician Liechtenstein recognised this well beforehand, leading him to advise Matthias that efforts should be made to win the favour of the ordinary people and to separate them from the nobility, thus strengthening the position of the government.¹² Whether or not this was feasible, it does draw attention to an important distinction, that the developing crisis was not one between the prince and the people, but between the prince and the privileged classes, the aristocracy and gentry. Many of the champions of freedom, including Tschernembl and Wilhelm Kinsky, were nevertheless determined advocates of keeping the lower orders in their place, as was evident during the peasants' revolt in Austria in 1597, and in the omission of religious freedom for the peasants in the Estates agreement made in parallel to the Letter of Majesty in 1609.¹³ Burkhardt also notes the irony that during the social unrest after 1618 the Bohemian estates executed peasant rebels 'as though they were themselves the authorities rather than the next group who were to suffer this fate'.¹⁴

Historians have often seen the contacts during this period between later leaders of the Bohemian revolt and like-minded people in Germany, particularly in the Palatinate, as a preparation for the event itself. This may be valid at a theoretical level, insofar as it concerned the

exchange of ideas and influences between radically inclined individuals, often Calvinists or members of the Bohemian Brethren. There was indeed a wide although numerically limited European correspondence network among such people, with the ubiquitous Christian of Anhalt never far from its centre, and many of those involved, including some of the Bohemians, had travelled widely and studied abroad.¹⁵ Hence they had been exposed to ideas such as monarchomachism, the right of resistance to an unjust prince, extending if necessary to revolt or even tyrannicide. Nevertheless such contacts fall far short of providing evidence of wider support for these concepts among the Bohemian upper class, or of any practical planning or even intent towards actual revolt by the few participants. Thus when it is reported that Thurn, Schlick and Wenzel Kinsky told a representative of the elector of Saxony in 1614 that the Bohemians were aiming to depose the Habsburgs, it is more likely that they were speaking for themselves and a small core group of Lutheran activists than for the Protestant estates as a whole. Moreover it is clear that they were then thinking in terms not of organising a violent revolt but of securing the legitimate election of an alternative candidate as Matthias's successor, preferably the elector of Saxony himself.¹⁶

The problems in Bohemia which eventually triggered off the crisis leading to the defenestration had begun to develop almost as soon as the ink was dry on Rudolf's abdication. In contrast to his efforts to seek conciliation in the Empire, Matthias initially adopted much the same approach in both Austria and Bohemia as had his predecessor, seeking to place and keep as many offices as possible in the hands of Catholics, and to apply the most restrictive possible interpretation to the religious concessions which he and Rudolf had been obliged to make. He was more successful in Austria, where the concessions had in any case been less far-reaching, but in Bohemia too loopholes were found and exploited. Thus although Protestants had gained the right to build their own churches the Catholic authorities, with royal support, began to reassert their right to appoint the ministers at existing churches, many of which had previously been taken over by the Protestants. Hence where Protestant incumbents died Catholics were appointed in their place, and elsewhere some pastors were forced out and replaced by priests.¹⁷ Parts of the royal lands were also transferred to the Catholic church, so that many villages lost the rights clearly granted to those living on crown property by the Letter of Majesty, while in others peasants were forbidden to attend churches on nearby Protestant estates.¹⁸ There were also reports of private Catholic landowners seeking to coerce their tenants into attending Mass. Such steps, individually small and

localised, had a cumulative effect in creating an apparent threat to the gains the Protestants had made, and in provoking the predictable defensive response.

The most contentious issue was the right to build churches, or more precisely the right of Protestants living on Catholic church lands to build their own churches, as although the general right was clear the drafting of the Letter was insufficiently specific in this latter respect. Lawyers then and since have debated earnestly, and often ingeniously, over the wording of the text. That the right extended to royal lands was not disputed, but some have argued that the term 'royal lands' as used in the Bohemian bureaucracy of the time was understood to include church lands, not least because the Catholic church had lost most of its property in the Hussite period, so that by the early seventeenth century many church estates were in fact tenancies held from the crown. Catholics, on the other hand, argued that church land was only protected, not owned, by the crown.¹⁹ In the end the exact legal position, if there is one, is largely irrelevant, the key point being that both sides interpreted the Letter according to their own interests, and both held firm as the resultant disputes escalated during the following years.

The churches in question were only two in number, in the otherwise insignificant small towns of Braunau (Broumov) and Klostergrab (Hrob), respectively on the north-eastern and north-western borders of Bohemia. Both were on ecclesiastical estates, so that the feudal overlords were Catholic clerics, in the former case the abbot of a Benedictine monastery and in the latter the archbishop of Prague. Their Protestant subjects were quick off the mark in exercising their claimed right to build churches, and Matthias had scarcely gained the Bohemian throne when in August 1611 he received a complaint from the abbot of Braunau about their activities. He and his advisers duly upheld the Catholic interpretation of the Letter of Majesty in this respect, and he issued an order forbidding the Protestants of Braunau to continue with their building. The Bohemian defensors, appointed to safeguard the privileges granted to the Protestants by the Letter of Majesty, then assembled in November, declared the order to be a breach of its terms, and instructed the citizens of Braunau to carry on. This they did, as the abbot lacked the resources to prevent them and the authorities made no move to enforce their prohibition, and in due course Protestant services were held in the new church.

In Klostergrab the archbishop made his own attempts to forbid the building work, expelling the Protestant pastor in November 1614, and he too obtained a declaration from Matthias's Bohemian government

that the church was illegal, but as in Braunau this remained unenforced. The disputes were then taken up, along with other complaints about infringements of their religious liberties, by the Bohemian Protestants at the general assembly of the Estates of the Habsburg lands in Prague in 1615, where they declared themselves ready to defend their rights against whosoever should threaten them.²⁰ At that point their resolve was not put to the test, as Matthias and Khlesl were seeking conciliation in the Empire rather than a further confrontation in Bohemia, but the issue continued to smoulder until Catholic hard-liners in the Bohemian administration gained a freer hand a couple of years later.

Ferdinand's succession in Bohemia

In December 1611, shortly before his election as emperor, the 54-year-old Matthias had married his cousin, the 26-year-old Anna of Tyrol, but within a couple of years it was clear that no heir and successor was likely to result from the marriage, and indeed Anna died in 1618, three months before her husband. Hence the succession question which had vexed Rudolf throughout his last decade was quickly back on the Habsburg agenda, and it had not become any easier, as there were few potentially suitable candidates.

Emperor Ferdinand I had three sons, all of whom in turn had sons, so that, excluding those who did not live to manhood, he had a total of eleven grandsons. Three of these, including Rudolf, had already died leaving no surviving legitimate children, but seven were still living, as well as Matthias. However the latter's brothers Maximilian and Albrecht, as well as his cousin Karl of Burgau, were all only three years or less younger than the emperor himself, so that they might survive him only briefly or perhaps not at all, and none had legitimate children. That left Ferdinand of Styria, then in his mid-thirties, and his three younger brothers, two of whom were already bishops and the third an officer of the priestly German Order of Knights.

Ferdinand was the obvious candidate, particularly as he already had three sons to provide for the future succession, but he was also the most divisive. His bold youthful recatholicisation of his Inner Austrian provinces had marked him down as an arch-enemy for the Protestants, as had his accompanying curtailment of the rights and privileges of the Estates, and there was nothing to suggest that age and experience had mellowed his approach. Bohemia, Hungary, and Upper and Lower Austria had all recently been engaged in protracted struggles with Rudolf over religious and political freedoms, and the tensions were still

apparent under Matthias. The nomination of a militant protagonist of counter-Reformation as his successor did not seem likely to be readily accepted.

Strictly speaking, the succession initially concerned only the Habsburg family territories, but it carried with it the expectation that the nominee would in due course also be the Habsburg candidate for the Imperial crown. At a time when Matthias and Khlesl were seeking to reduce tension in the Empire, and working to establish what the latter called a *Komposition* or understanding with the Protestant princes, confirmation of Ferdinand as the Habsburg successor and prospective emperor was likely to be unhelpful, to say the very least. The Spanish too were uncomfortable, as trouble in the Empire or the Austrian Habsburg lands would be extremely unwelcome as their truce in the Netherlands approached its end, when they were hoping to concentrate all available resources on the renewed war with the Dutch. Khlesl therefore sought to delay action on the succession as long as possible, arguing that it should be addressed only after his *Komposition* had been achieved in the Empire, while Matthias was by no means anxious to confront his own mortality by establishing a successor before it became absolutely necessary.

Meanwhile Ferdinand found an ally in Archduke Maximilian of Tyrol, the elder of Matthias's two remaining brothers, and an increasingly personal animosity developed between these two on the one side and Khlesl on the other.²¹ Khlesl's influence on Matthias meant that he held the stronger political position, enhanced by his appointment as a cardinal in 1616, so with action on the succession blocked for the time being they concentrated on clearing other potential obstacles. For Ferdinand to be endorsed other possible contenders would have to waive their claims, including Maximilian himself and his brother Albrecht in the Netherlands. That did not prove unduly difficult, although both limited their waivers to the Hungarian and Bohemian crowns, reserving their positions on Austria, but Philip III of Spain presented a more formidable problem.

The Habsburg family was of course not limited to the Austrian branch, and after Matthias's election as emperor Philip had been quick to lay claim to the succession to the family territories. His argument was that he was a grandson, indeed the only surviving grandson, of Emperor Maximilian II, which was true enough although his descent was in the female line, his mother being Maximilian's eldest child, Rudolf's and Matthias's older sister, whereas Ferdinand was only Maximilian's nephew. How serious Philip was in his candidacy is an open question,

particularly in respect of the Empire, as he must have been well aware that a Spanish contender would have been as unwelcome to the Protestant electors as the arch-Catholic Ferdinand, while even the Catholic electors were likely to have reservations. Significantly, almost from the outset Philip set a price for giving way to Ferdinand, asking for the cession of various detached Austrian Habsburg possessions, most notably Alsace, to the Spanish branch. Initially the price was too high and the prospective succession too far off, but secret and more serious discussions were later resumed.²²

These negotiations also became bound up with the Uzkok war, which ranged Ferdinand's Inner Austria against Venice and her allies around the Adriatic from late 1615 onwards. It is not necessary to discuss the causes or course of this conflict here, other than to note that Ferdinand was having very much the worst of it and was receiving very little help. His only prospective salvation seemed to be Spanish money and diplomatic support, but that came at a price, which in turn involved the question of the succession. A secret agreement was eventually brokered in early 1617 by Oñate, the Spanish ambassador to the Imperial court, in which Ferdinand committed himself to make substantial territorial concessions to Spain once he had successfully become emperor.²³ In return Philip waived his own claim to the succession and provided Ferdinand with a large subsidy to strengthen his Uzkok war effort, together with the mediation which eventually enabled the latter to achieve a face-saving settlement on terms which amounted to the *status quo ante*.²⁴

Despite Khlesl, Archduke Maximilian made repeated efforts during this period to gather support for the election of Ferdinand as king of the Romans, but in the end he failed to secure agreement even for the electors to meet to consider setting a date for the necessary formal assembly. The search for *Komposition* in the Empire had greater priority for many there too, while the Calvinist electors of the Palatinate and Brandenburg were determined not to participate in an election until a broader political settlement satisfactory to them had been reached. Less openly, the former in particular was actively seeking an alternative candidate, even accepting that a Catholic would be necessary, to put forward when the time came.

With the Oñate agreement all but concluded, Matthias was finally persuaded by his failing health to proceed with establishing Ferdinand as his successor in the Habsburg lands, and it was decided to start in Bohemia, not least because Ferdinand would thus himself become an elector, enhancing his status prior to an Imperial election. Hence the

Bohemian Estates were summoned to meet on 5 June 1617. Expecting opposition, Matthias's officials laid their plans carefully, but even they were probably astounded by the ease, speed and completeness of their success.

Why the Bohemian Protestants allowed themselves to be so easily induced to accept Ferdinand as their king is a question which has often been asked, but the most likely answer is the simplest. The leading opponents came to the meeting ill-prepared, and they were comprehensively outmanoeuvred by the royal officials. On the day prior to the opening of the Estates the latter invited most of the higher-ranking members to a meeting, ostensibly to discuss aspects of the royal finances, but from that they moved on to probe the attitude of those present to the forthcoming debate on the succession. It was, they said, a foregone conclusion, and thus it would be better not to incur royal displeasure by causing an unseemly wrangle. Anyone who did so had better have two heads, as he was likely to lose one. Some, it is reported, took this warning so much to heart that they quietly left Prague to avoid having to declare their position on the following day.

Early next morning the royal councillors called another pre-meeting of office-holders and other leading figures, both Catholic and Protestant, with Thurn the only notable absentee. Here, as they had expected, some objected that the terms of the summons referred to Ferdinand's 'acceptance', whereas they contended that they had a right to elect their future king. This opened the way for the chancellor, Zdeněk Lobkowitz, to deliver a carefully prepared analysis of the history of the Bohemian crown, in which he argued that it had never been elective but had passed by hereditary right, and as was well known both Maximilian II and Rudolf II had been specifically accepted, not elected, by the Estates. The situation in 1608, when Rudolf and Matthias had referred to the latter's 'election' as prospective successor to the throne, was, said Lobkowitz, exceptional. Most of those present had also been present in 1608, and they were well aware that Matthias's election had been that of a single candidate with a large army at his back encamped immediately outside Prague, while Lobkowitz's other legal arguments were persuasive enough to convince some of those who had expressed reservations to confirm a change of mind.

The Estates meeting opened shortly afterwards, with Matthias presiding, flanked by the archdukes Ferdinand and Maximilian. Here it was formally proclaimed that because of his increasing age and infirmity Matthias required the appointment of a successor as king of Bohemia, and that as his two brothers were also of similar age the chosen

candidate was Ferdinand, who was now put forward for acceptance. Declarations from Maximilian and Albrecht confirming their waivers were also read out, and the proceedings were then adjourned until the following day, 6 June.

When they resumed the next stage was to ask the Bohemian royal officers, in order of seniority, to give their opinions. This went predictably smoothly until it came to Thurn, who was one of the few remaining Protestants to hold an official post. Carefully avoiding attacking Ferdinand personally, Thurn nevertheless asserted the right of the Estates to elect, not merely to accept a future king, adding that the procedure should also be deferred until representatives of the other lands of the Bohemian crown could be present and take part. Again this had been expected, and this time a second senior official, Sternberg, reiterated Lobkowitz's legal assessment, reinforcing its message for those who had already heard it and setting it out in full to the lower-ranking members who had not been present on the previous day. Thurn's lame effort to delay matters by reference to the other Bohemian lands was easily dismissed. The Bohemians, said Sternberg, had never consulted the other lands over the choice of their king, which everyone knew was true, and in any case he was not king in those lands, but duke or margrave respectively. As no-one was ready or able to refute Sternberg's arguments the opponents desperately needed to reappraise their tactics, but again the officials were too quick for them, moving straight on to a vote. Each member present, in order of rank, was required to give his vote individually and openly, and once the top few, Count Schlick prominent among them, had accepted Ferdinand the matter was effectively decided, as with each succeeding acquiescent response it became less likely that those further down the hierarchical line would dare to break ranks. Thurn did vote against, but he was supported only by his usual ally Fels, while even the most militant members of the Bohemian Brethren such as Budowetz and Wenzel Ruppa tamely capitulated.²⁵

Estates meetings were traditionally leisurely affairs, with sessions interspersed with long recesses, often of several days, so that it was usually a matter of weeks before deliberations actually proceeded to any form of decision. In this case the speed with which the business was driven through deprived the opposition of the opportunity to organise themselves and to work on their less politically inclined co-religionists. They also had a bare month's notice of the meeting and its intended purpose, a short time in an age of slow travel and no other means of communication, so that practical planning and canvassing would have

been largely limited to the few days beforehand during which members started to arrive in Prague. The most obvious problem, however, was the lack of an alternative candidate. As far as other possible Habsburgs were concerned the opposition had the same problem as the family itself, while there had been no time to look more widely, and in any case the most potentially suitable possibility, the elector of Saxony, had not responded positively to earlier hypothetical enquiries. Convincing the nervous majority to take the purely negative step of voting against Ferdinand would have been difficult without being able to suggest who might later be elected, and in such circumstances few were prepared to risk a pointedly personal vote against him when he might well have ended up as king in any case.

Nevertheless the members of the Estates recovered themselves quickly enough to seek to limit the damage. Ferdinand had been accepted but he was not yet crowned, and the principle was well established that the future king had to make a range of promises to his prospective subjects about his use of his powers before he was enthroned. Hence the Protestant majority presented a demand that Ferdinand should not only give the customary undertaking to respect all the rights and privileges of the Estates, but that he should also specifically guarantee to abide by the Letter of Majesty. This Ferdinand hesitated to do, not, as has often been suggested, because he had scruples about making a promise that he did not intend to keep, but because his own extreme Catholicism led him to fear that making concessions to heretics would be sinful and might endanger his personal salvation. Hence he consulted the Jesuits in Prague, who after due deliberation advised him that although that would have been the case were he making the concessions in the first place, as they had already been made he could safely confirm them. In this judgement they relied on the Catholic doctrine of accepting the lesser evil in order to prevent a greater one, in this case the possible loss of Catholic tenure of the Bohemian crown. Hence Ferdinand promised, and the Estates also extracted from him a promise that he would take no part in the government of Bohemia on his own account for as long as Matthias lived.²⁶ On 29 June he was crowned with all the usual pomp and ceremony, the whole process having taken three and a half weeks.

The Hungarians were either better prepared or made of sterner stuff, or perhaps both. With their strong devolved government controlled by their own paladin they were less concerned to oppose Ferdinand himself, but they were determined to have the process legally recognised as an election, not the mere acceptance which the Habsburg party again

proposed. Although other delays prevented the Hungarian Estates meeting for the purpose until March 1618, the members then argued and obstructed for two months, until the point was finally conceded and Ferdinand was elected king of Hungary in May, with his coronation following in July.

7

Insurrection

Prelude

Events moved rapidly in the eleven months between Ferdinand's coronation as king of Bohemia on 29 June 1617 and the outbreak of the revolt arising from the defenestration of Prague on 23 May 1618. Doubtless encouraged and emboldened by their easy victory over the succession, the Catholic party continued and increased its efforts to undermine little by little the gains the Protestants had made through the Letter of Majesty. As these steps were individually relatively small and localised, they were correspondingly difficult to resist, adding a growing feeling of frustration to the resentment and apprehension in the Protestant community and among their leaders.

Many country areas had already been affected by Matthias transferring churches on royal land into the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Prague, thus effectively, whether or not legally, depriving them of the religious freedoms granted by the Letter of Majesty. Now it was the turn of the towns, as royal officials sought increasingly to interfere with their autonomy in the Catholic interest. One approach was to manipulate the selection of council members and appointments to key positions, so that in the Old Town of Prague, for example, where the population was predominantly Protestant, Catholics came to occupy a good half of the council seats. Elsewhere applications for new citizenships began to be granted only to Catholics, ironically a reversal of some previous malpractices which had benefited only Protestants. Royal officials also started to insist that councils could only take certain actions after gaining their permission, including on religious matters such as the appointment of ministers, as a first step in imposing a growing control over what had previously been local prerogatives. This culminated

in November 1617 with a decree which for practical purposes withdrew the remaining civic rights of Prague and placed it under full royal control, while in December a new press law imposed censorship, with all publications thereafter requiring prior approval from the chancellor.¹

Individuals too were affected. In country areas there were many reports of Catholic landowners applying pressure on their tenants to return to Catholicism, a clear breach of the Letter of Majesty, and of some individuals choosing to emigrate rather than to comply. Such reports were disputed by the Catholic side, and some of them may well have been exaggerated or untrue, but they none the less added to the Protestant perception of growing persecution. Some pastors certainly lost their livings, and some urban officials likewise lost their posts, while even those at the top felt the pressure personally. Thurn was the most prominent loser. In 1612 he had gained the prestigious and particularly well-paid office of warden of Karlstein, the principal royal castle outside Prague and the traditional repository of the Bohemian royal coronation regalia, replacing Slavata in the post as one of a number of offices conceded to Protestants on Matthias's accession to the crown. After Ferdinand's coronation he lost it again, this time to Martinitz, although he was compensated with a nominally more senior but politically insignificant post in the legal system, which moreover carried only a fraction of the salary. Arguably he was luckier than some, as he was one of the very few Protestants left holding any royal office in Bohemia.

In December 1617 Matthias took his leave of Prague and moved the royal seat back to Vienna, ostensibly to be nearer Hungary, where the process of securing the crown for Ferdinand was proving troublesome, but largely as a matter of his own personal preference. He also took Zdeněk Lobkowitz with him, so that the Bohemians, who had long been used to having their king on the spot, now found themselves governed at a distance, with even their chancellor based in Vienna. Instead a council of ten regents was appointed to manage the administration, with Slavata and Martinitz among its most influential members and only a token three Protestants included, all minor figures, while Thurn, who even in his new position should by rank have warranted a place, was left out. The real power, however, lay in Vienna with Khlesl and Lobkowitz, who in an age of slow communications were in more than one sense out of touch, as events were to prove.

Angry and frustrated by the gradual but continual encroachments on the rights gained by the Protestants through the Letter of Majesty, their leaders needed a substantive issue upon which they could make a

stand, and Matthias and the new regents obligingly provided one. The disputes over the Protestant churches at Braunau and Klostergrab had been quiescent for a considerable time, but now the respective Catholic prelates involved sought to bring them to a head. A plea from the abbot at Braunau reached Matthias in December 1617 as he was *en route* from Prague to Vienna, and he accordingly summoned the citizens' representatives and issued them with an order to hand over their church to the abbot, and to report to the regents within four weeks that they had done so. Back in Braunau the citizens refused to comply, and when their delegates reported this in Prague they were arrested and imprisoned, as were further representatives who followed when summoned by the regents, but without the church keys which they had been ordered to bring. Despite this the Protestants in Braunau still refused to give up the church, so Matthias ordered the despatch of a royal commission to the town, a step which persuaded the councillors, anxious for their own safety, to advise their fellow citizens to back down. A tense meeting followed but made no progress, and when the commissioners attempted to seize the church themselves their way was barred by a mob wielding sticks and stones. Their final effort to achieve their objective by threatening the pastor was no more successful, forcing them to abandon their mission, and there the matter rested in early March 1618, with the church still in Protestant hands. However a number of Braunau citizens remained imprisoned in Prague, an apparently arbitrary injustice which presented both a challenge and an opportunity for the Protestant leadership.

Matters in Klostergrab had evolved differently. There the archbishop of Prague had succeeded several years before in locking up the new church and denying its use to the Protestant citizens. Moreover he had gone further, applying systematic pressure on them to abandon their confession and to return to Catholicism, reportedly fining any who attended Protestant services elsewhere, and even refusing marriages to those who did not go to Mass. Heartened by his success and by the spirit of Catholic revival in the months after Ferdinand's acceptance as the new king, the archbishop saw the opportunity to settle the matter once and for all. He too acted in December 1617, sending in workmen to demolish the Protestant church. They met with no resistance, but the symbolism of the move created outrage well beyond Bohemia.²

The Letter of Majesty and associated agreements had provided for the appointment of a body of defensors to watch over the freedoms which had been granted to the Protestants. They were also empowered

to summon a wider meeting of representatives of the estates and towns to consider any apparent breaches and to make representations to the emperor accordingly. The long series of individually minor Catholic pressures had not provided a clear case for such action, but the jailing of the Braunau citizens and the razing of the Klostergrab church, occurring as they did almost simultaneously, made such a response inevitable. Not everyone was ready to risk taking part, and there were many absentees, particularly from the towns, when the assembly met in Prague in early March 1618. The event itself increased the tension, as the debates dealt not only with the issue of the two churches but also provided the opportunity for airing a whole range of more local grievances, thereby strengthening the feeling that Protestantism was under pressure on all sides. The resulting anger led to calls for a determined response, so that the meeting not only prepared a comprehensive complaint, which was despatched to the emperor in Vienna on 11 March, but also agreed to meet again on 21 May to consider his reply.

That reply came much more quickly than had been expected, sent out from Vienna only ten days later, and it, rather than the original complaints, soon became the principal subject of the escalating crisis. In Vienna the calling of the meeting by the defensors and the wide-ranging protest arising from it were seen as challenges requiring a show of strength in return, rather than a considered response on the issues themselves, and Khlesl accordingly advised Matthias that it was time 'to play the lion rather than the fox'. It was a disastrous decision, as Khlesl had completely misjudged the Protestant mood in Bohemia, to the extent that even the Catholic hardliner Slavata later recorded that he had been 'astonished by the hard, sharp tone of the letter' sent in the emperor's name in reply.³ The assembly, it said, had been directed against the emperor, and all royal officials and representatives of the royal towns were directed to take no part in any further meeting. Moreover the proposed second gathering on 21 May was prohibited, all consideration of the actual complaints was to be deferred until such time as the emperor returned to Prague, and the leading figures were threatened with personal punishment.

This rapid response, and its unexpected and uncompromising nature, caused consternation among the defensors. Moreover it gave rise to a significant further misunderstanding. Correctly concluding that Matthias would only have adopted such an intransigent position on the prompting of his advisers, the defensors mistakenly identified not Khlesl but the men on the spot in Prague as the likely culprits, specifically



Image 1 The defenestration of Prague, 23 May 1618 (19th-century painting)
Photo from akg images.

the regents and in particular their long-standing arch-Catholic enemies Slavata and Martinitz. That the emperor's letter had been transmitted to them not directly but via the regents added to this suspicion, which in turn enabled the defensors to proceed towards a confrontation on the classic historical basis that they were opposing not the monarch but his evil advisers.

The defenestration

The parallel with Emperor Rudolf II's prohibition of the unauthorised assembly of the Estates in Prague New Town city hall in May 1609, which eventually led to the Letter of Majesty, was evident, and given that many of the same leading individuals were involved it is not surprising that the meeting called by the defensors likewise went ahead on 21 May 1618. Shortly beforehand the regents produced a new letter from the emperor, in which Khlesl, doubtless acting on local advice, had softened the tone considerably, but unfortunately this gesture was offset by the fact that the missive still ordered the Protestants to abandon their planned assembly, leaving the substantive issues to be considered at some later time. This was put to those defensors who were in Prague, but they declined to act upon it, claiming that to do so was both outside their authority and also impractical, as the representatives were already on their way.

Even so Imperial pressure had its effect, and once again many stayed away from the assembly, especially those holding official positions and the representatives of the royal towns, who had been specifically instructed by the emperor not to attend. Nevertheless there was a large gathering, perhaps approaching a hundred in number and dominated by members of the nobility, but initially the majority seem to have been more nervous than confrontational. One of the leading participants, the Prague lawyer Martin Fruewein, later testified that he had personally begged Slavata that he and the other regents should 'deal with the situation in such a way that it could be resolved amicably, the most important thing being that the prisoners from Braunau should be released from arrest'. The assembly itself adopted a resolution drafted by Fruewein, which sought to explain the reasons for their conduct, in support of which they also decided 'to appeal to the principal royal officers to intercede with the emperor on their behalf'.⁴

The mood on the opening day was influenced as much by the emperor's letters as by the original grievances, as the delegates felt themselves fully entitled to meet in accordance with the rights legally granted

in 1609, and the repeated prohibition only served to confirm the view that those rights were being progressively eroded. When the assembly met again on the following day, 22 May, the discussion centred on how to respond, as a result of which a four-man delegation headed by Schlick was sent to the castle to ask the regents to receive the members *en bloc*, the intention being to demand of them whether or not they had advised upon or drafted the emperor's original letter. Rather surprisingly the regents agreed, probably not realising how many would attend or what they were planning to ask, telling them to come the following morning, Wednesday 23 May, after the church service for the eve of Ascension Day.⁵

Before that various other rumours and alarms increased the tension in the hothouse atmosphere of Prague that night. 'Meanwhile', testified Fruewein, 'a report had spread rapidly among the people that the defenders' lives were in the greatest danger', another echo of the incidents which had inflamed tempers during the 1609 meeting.⁶ Even more ominously, it was learned that the guard on the castle had been doubled, following which anxious enquiries were made, eventually eliciting an explanation from the captain of the garrison. He had indeed doubled the guard, not on the orders of the regents, but on his own authority in accordance with long-standing practice during Ascension week, when for some reason the guard had always been doubled. By no means convinced, many of the assembly members decided to go well armed the following morning, and to be accompanied to the castle by their retainers.

Precisely what happened on that day remains uncertain. Partly this is because far too many Protestant representatives went to the castle for them to be accommodated in an orderly meeting, so that the room was packed. All were standing, as chairs and benches had been removed to make space, while others stood outside the doors in an adjoining room or in the corridor, and as a result few could have been in a position to see and hear clearly all that went on. Thus even reports from those who were present are intrinsically unreliable, and there are in any case few such accounts extant, not least because any from the Protestant side were potentially incriminating, and like other dangerous documents they would probably have been destroyed as the revolt collapsed.⁷ A small amount of information emerged thereafter in the course of the Habsburg investigations, but mainly from individuals who were on trial for their lives, so that their evidence is obviously suspect.

The problem is compounded by the speed with which the event became a *cause célèbre*, the reports of which were often tainted by propaganda or commercially motivated sensationalism, so that fact and

fiction are difficult to distinguish. This applies particularly to accounts which appeared in the press of the time, but also to letters and reports, even official ones, which were almost entirely based on second-hand or hearsay information from sources which were themselves dubious. Similar reservations apply to the account given by Skála, a Protestant academic who fled Prague after the defeat of the revolt, and who later settled in Freiburg and wrote the first history of Bohemia to cover the period from 1602 to 1623.⁸ His version of the events in Prague in May 1618 has to be treated with great care, even though he may have had a certain amount of near-direct knowledge, as historians from that period were notoriously cavalier about sources, as well as prone to inventing speeches which seemed to them to be appropriate. The Czech historian and archivist Anton Gindely drew heavily upon this work, which was eventually published in the 1860s, but whatever its wider merits it is not an authentic first-hand account of the defenestration.

The only such records actually available are those provided by the two main victims themselves. Slavata, however, wrote his account many years later in his memoirs, while his report of the defenestration itself is brief and may well be derivative, noting that he suffered a severe head injury in his fall. Thus the main details he gives correspond closely to Martinitz's account, and he devotes much more space to the latter's subsequent escape to Bavaria, although he could have had no personal knowledge of that as he was confined to bed in Prague recovering from his injuries at the time.⁹ The most comprehensive description of the whole event is that attributed to Martinitz, a version of which was also reportedly published soon after the event.¹⁰

The following summary is drawn from Martinitz except where otherwise noted, but some further caveats are necessary. Martinitz's text suffers from many of the usual problems of eyewitness accounts, in that eyewitnesses do not see and hear everything, and they often remember and record imperfectly what they do see and hear. He and his colleagues were in one corner of the room, hemmed in by a large number of men who were often shouting, sometimes from the back and not infrequently at the same time, while the principal speakers were addressing the regents. It must have been difficult for them to hear exactly what was said, and to note who said it, and it would have been virtually impossible for them to hear much of what was said between themselves by the leading figures or other members of the crowd. Martinitz may well be broadly correct about the main sequence of events leading up to the defenestration, but he was not able to capture and record the internal dynamics driving the mood of the mob facing him, so that his account describes *what* happened, rather than *how* or *why* it came

about. Moreover he wrote at some unknown length of time afterwards, and like most eyewitnesses he probably shaped his account to make a neater and more coherent story, and to make it fit in with his own overall perception of the occasion, of which he was anything but a neutral observer.¹¹ Nevertheless, unlike most of those present, there is no obvious reason why Martinitz should lie or deliberately conceal the truth, although he has certainly completed his account by adding information learned afterwards from others, most notably what happened to Slavata and the secretary Fabricius after he himself had been the first hurled from the window.

Martinitz begins by reporting that the Protestant estates arrived at about nine in the morning, accompanied by their retainers. There was a very large crowd, so large that the council chamber was filled by members of the nobility, while the representatives of the towns had to remain outside the open doors. Another source states that they had first assembled briefly in an anteroom, where the document to be presented to the regents was read out by Paul Říčan.¹² In the event only four of the ten regents were there to receive them, another was known to be ill, and the remaining five were reportedly away from Prague, the three Protestants among them. The most senior of those present was Adam Sternberg, a long-serving royal office-holder, and he was accompanied by yet another Lobkowitz, the elderly Diepold, and by Martinitz and Slavata. The regents were expecting their visitors to deliver a reply to the most recent royal letter, but instead Říčan again read out his document, which contained a protest at the emperor's first 'extremely shocking' letter and went on to demand to know whether any of the regents had known of, advised upon, or approved it.

Sternberg attempted to avoid the issue by claiming that they needed to consult their sick colleague, following which they would give a reply two days later, as the next day was the Ascension holiday. This was immediately rejected by several speakers, among them Thurn, Fels and Wilhelm Lobkowitz, and after a short conference among themselves the regents tried another tack, this time arguing that their oath and duty as royal councillors prevented them from revealing who had given what advice or anything else about confidential business. Thurn responded that this was an unsatisfactory answer, and that they did not intend to leave until they received a better one, at which point Hans Litwin Říčan grabbed a pistol from his belt and made threatening gestures before firing it off demonstratively. Sternberg once more consulted his colleagues privately, before announcing that as they were being placed under duress they had no choice but to answer despite their oath. He

could therefore reply with a clear conscience that they had not given any advice on the royal letter. This was received angrily by many of those present, with shouts that the emperor's order was a breach of the Letter of Majesty.

Some now addressed Sternberg and Diepold Lobkowitz, saying that they realised that the two of them were not ill-disposed to the Protestant estates but had been persuaded and led astray by Slavata and Martinitz. Turning then on the latter two, they accused them of being their true enemies and of aiming to deprive them of the rights granted by the Letter of Majesty, as well as having persecuted the Protestant tenants on their own private lands. A long argument then followed, in which the two regents defended themselves against these and other accusations which were brought forward, including Wilhelm Lobkowitz's assertion that they had been instrumental in 'leading us by the nose' at the assembly to accept Ferdinand as king, and in trying to avoid him reconfirming the Letter of Majesty. The crowd grew steadily more hostile, whipped up, says Martinitz, by the leading figures, notable among them Thurn and Wilhelm Lobkowitz, causing Slavata to appeal to them not to be over-hasty in taking any action against them, but if they had complaints to put these forward through the due processes of the law.

At this point Ruppá began to read out another document, arguing that the two regents had always been enemies of the Protestants, as shown by their refusal in 1609 to sign the Letter of Majesty and by their subsequent efforts to undermine the rights which had been granted. It was now clear, he said, that the emperor's letter had been drafted in Prague on their advice, with the intention of ending the Protestant freedoms once and for all. 'Thus we declare you to be our enemies, enemies of the country, and the destroyers of our rights and the general peace. We shall proceed directly against you, imposing a heavy punishment.' After this speech – 'or something like it', notes Martinitz – Ruppá shouted: 'Do you all subscribe to this? Then declare it now!' His call was received with general acclamation, even from friends of the two regents and Slavata's many relatives who were present. He and Martinitz tried again to defend themselves with counter-arguments, but seeing the mounting hostility they eventually concluded with a plea for respect for the royal castle and their own positions as councillors, and for no violence to be used against them.

It was too late. Sternberg and Diepold Lobkowitz were ushered out of the room, and the other two were seized, each by several men. Those grabbing Slavata included Schlick and Thurn – 'I think', adds Martinitz – while he names his own assailants as Wilhelm Lobkowitz, Hans Litwin

Říčan, Ulrich Kinsky, Albrecht Jan Smiřický and Paul Kapliř. Even at this stage the regents thought they were only going to be arrested, but as they were dragged past the door and towards the window they began to perceive their fate and to ask for confessors, requests which were sarcastically rejected. Martinitz was first, and without further delay he was thrust out of the window. Slavata was next, and although he tried to hold on to the window frame a heavy blow on his fingers broke his grip, and he went the same way. Finally Smiřický and Ehrenfried Berbisdorf turned on the regents' secretary, Philipp Fabricius, in pursuit of a private quarrel, says Martinitz, and helped by others they threw him too out of the window.

Despite a drop of some fifteen metres (fifty feet) all three survived, Fabricius unharmed and Martinitz only slightly hurt, while although Slavata sustained a severe head injury that was caused not by the fall as such but by him hitting his head on a lower window ledge as he fell. Various theories have been put forward to explain their escape, the victims themselves claiming divine intervention, while Protestant detractors maintained that they fell into a dung heap. Both are equally unlikely, as even in the seventeenth century they did not put dung heaps below council chamber windows with summer coming on, while the suggestion that the men's cloaks acted almost as parachutes is merely fanciful. A more plausible explanation was put forward in a pamphlet published soon afterwards, which stated that the area where they landed was covered with 'sweepings', possibly the remains of the previous autumn's leaves from the castle courtyard, while the ground itself was 'soft pond-earth', perhaps where water had stood in the ditch over the winter.¹³ The most likely answer is a combination of these and other factors. The lower part of the castle wall slopes outwards rather than being vertical, while today there is a large mature creeper standing out from the wall near the relevant window. By late May there might also have been thick undergrowth and perhaps bushes on the ground around the walls. One way or another the men's falls were broken, the fact being more significant than the precise mechanism.

According to Slavata, a number of Thurn's men – 'so it is reported' – came running along a wall some way beyond the ditch, and in response to shouted orders from the window above they opened fire on the survivors of the fall, continuing to shoot while Martinitz attended to his injured colleague.¹⁴ Initially this drove off the retainers who came to help them, but despite the fusillade they made a second attempt, dragging Slavata away through a door into the castle precinct, while

Martinitz managed to escape up a ladder back into the building and Fabricius found his way out independently. Noting that Slavata was very anxious to stress the miraculous nature of their escape it seems likely that this part of his account is at best greatly exaggerated, as no-one was hit during this supposedly prolonged gunfire, although he claims that Martinitz had shot-holes in his clothes and a scratch on his arm. Two of those who were present at the defenestration said at their trials that they had heard *the* shot (possibly the one fired earlier by Hans Litwin Říčan), one adding that he did not know to that day who had fired it, while another who was not there stated that he had heard only that one of Thurn's men had fired at someone.¹⁵ Martinitz himself makes no mention of being shot at, ending his account of his ordeal with his safe landing, and of course Slavata himself was virtually, if not actually, unconscious at the relevant time.

The two regents were able to take refuge in the lodgings of the absent chancellor, Zdeněk Lobkowitz, where, it is said, Thurn sought them later in the day, accompanied by armed men, but was driven off by the chancellor's formidable wife. Martinitz made his escape under cover of darkness, eventually making his way to Bavaria, while Slavata stayed in Prague for an extended period to recover from his injury, subject only to a loose house arrest, until he too was finally able to slip away. After the defeat of the revolt the two regents were elevated to the rank of count in 1621, while Fabricius was ennobled with the title of 'von Hohenfall', that is 'of the high fall'.

A defenestration plot?

Most modern histories of the Thirty Years War (Parker's being an exception) maintain that the defenestration was planned in advance and carried out by a small group led by Thurn, with the specific intention of committing the Bohemians irrevocably to a revolt. Thus Wilson, one of the most recent writers, says that 'the revolt was not a popular uprising, but an aristocratic coup led by a minority of desperate militant Protestants'. In the Estates assembly Thurn and his associates 'whipped up passions by claiming the regents intended to arrest them. It was time, Thurn declared on 22 May to "throw them out of the window, as is customary"... He met his closest supporters that evening in Albrecht Jan Smiřický's house near the castle to coordinate the plot for the next day... This time the conspirators were fully prepared to use violence.' After they had done so, concludes Wilson, 'Thurn had achieved his objective of radicalising the situation'.¹⁶

Other writers follow the same line. Schormann states simply that ‘the radical group around Thurn stepped in. . . . What was designed to look like the spontaneous act of an incensed crowd was in reality the planned deed of a few people.’¹⁷ Asch goes further. ‘This defenestration was not as spontaneous as it may have seemed. . . . Thurn and his close friends had planned this “execution” carefully. Its real purpose was to close the door to any compromise between the reigning dynasty, the Habsburgs, with their Catholic advisers, and the Protestant opposition. By killing the regents, the Protestants would burn their boats.’¹⁸ Burkhardt concurs. ‘The defenestration of Prague did not correspond to the idealised picture of a revolution. The spontaneous act of communal anger was agreed upon beforehand in the palace of the of the richest and most politically influential nobleman in the city, Albrecht Jan Smiřický.’ There, says Burkhardt, ‘the activist party in the Estates decided on a takeover of power and took the necessary steps to achieve it’.¹⁹ Kampmann too contends that ‘the radicals around Thurn’ used the crisis over the Braunau church and the resulting defensors meeting ‘to stage-manage the deposition of the ruling dynasty. . . . As Count Thurn and his radical fellow-travellers had planned, the angry battle of words turned into open violence. . . . The planned murder was unsuccessful, but the radicals around Thurn nevertheless achieved their objective. . . . The Protestant estates were firmly committed to a confrontation with Vienna.’²⁰ Schmidt notes more briefly that ‘under the leadership of Count Heinrich Matthias von Thurn . . . the estates were set upon a breach, a “liberating” act, in order to win back the initiative. . . . The defenestration was deliberately linked to the action of the Hussites in the New Town city hall in 1419.’²¹ Arndt is less specific, although he too presents the event as being pre-planned: ‘The symbolic attack on the regents was deliberately carried out.’²²

This consensus rests on very shaky foundations, indeed hardly any foundations at all in terms of positive evidence, as the present author has been able to find only one work which cites any primary sources to support it. The concept apparently stems entirely from the first volume of Gindely’s major study of the Thirty Years War, published in 1869, before which this conviction that the defenestration was deliberately planned and organised does not appear in either contemporary accounts or earlier histories.

The near-contemporary chronicles, the *Theatrum Europaeum* and Khevenhüller’s *Annales Ferdinandeï*, the former a Protestant and the latter a Catholic source, both give relatively brief accounts, but neither claims that the act was planned or that Thurn was the main instigator.

As the *Theatrum* drew heavily for its material on the press of the day, including commercial flysheets and the propaganda publications of both sides, this suggests that premeditation was not widely alleged at the time.²³ Khevenhüller's silence on the point is also significant, as he was a long-serving Habsburg councillor who in his retirement became a semi-official historian of Emperor Ferdinand II's career and reign, with access to the relevant Imperial archives. Although he angrily describes the defenestration as 'against all divine and human law', and even 'against the customs of all heathens and pagans', he nevertheless does not suggest that the attempted assassination was the result of a plot. Moreover Thurn is not among the four principal perpetrators he names. On the contrary he states that Thurn was one of the three men who, immediately before Slavata and Martinitz were attacked, had led the other two regents 'through the rebellious mob out of the chancellery and accompanied them to their homes'.²⁴

Two hundred years later the great German historian Leopold Ranke was still of the opinion that the defenestration was an act of 'thoughtless violence'.²⁵ However the pro-Habsburg Austrian historian Hurter, writing shortly before Gindely, had a somewhat different view, concluding that 'from this whole course of events it stands out unmistakably that the mob went up to the castle with murderous intentions, and that the outcome was not first initiated by the exchange of words'. This, he said, was 'scarcely to be doubted', effectively admitting that it was pure supposition, as he made no attempt to supply any form of proof.²⁶ Nor indeed did he contend that it was a conspiracy, his wording suggesting more a potentially violent mob than a cabal with a prepared plan. It was left to Gindely to make this latter claim, and hence it is necessary to examine the reliability of the evidence he offered.

Referring to Thurn's 'carefully thought-out attack aimed at smashing the Imperial power', Gindely says that he was 'determined to give the signal for the outbreak of revolt and to take his place at its head', by means of an action 'through which a return to the old order would become as impossible for the Protestant estates as it would for himself. The most effective method of achieving such an irreparable breach was the murder of the regents, and that plan originated in Thurn's head'.²⁷ Gindely goes on to state:

The final decision over the fateful deed was made in the course of 22 May, at a meeting held at the palace of the rich Albrecht Smiřický in the Prague Lesser Town. . . . This took place in a tower room situated on one side, and the participants are known from a statement made

Sicut Directus et cetera tractavit ab ipso
 Communitati subleuato. Quod est
 decessales Slaustra.
 factus est et ab ipso subleuato
 mentis et plerumque esse in consilio
 psit.
 Resertus fuit et Electus pideria
 Antecessoribus et Antecessoribus
 Designat: filij fuit ymmonit.
 Non seruet Veris fuit
 Lingua abscindi et periculi
 Beedlan
 In a. f. Agi et in Va. g.
 publicas
 Et Caput de Restro.

14 Wenceslaus Budowet
 Citatus Defensoris. et put
 in falgia in Ricthare.
 factus se Coniurasse cu. Turm
 et Sui. dictio. tamen uan
 alio respectu q. d. ligianis
 in Turri Sui. dictio. Domus
 Conseruit in Arma
 Conseruit et p. d. logia. an. thij
 Suleuauit meolus
 Inuauit personab. ter fuit

A 60
 466

Image 2 Bohemian chancellor Zdeněk Lobkowitz's note of the trial findings against Wenzel Budowetz

Photo used with permission from Lobkowitz Library and Archives, Nelahozeves Castle, Czech Republic.

by Budowetz. In the court hearing which took place three years later he confessed that he had decided upon the defenestration, together with Count Thurn and Albrecht Smiřický.

This information Gindely attributes not to Budowetz's actual testimony, which was not then and is not now extant, but to a 'note in his own handwriting made by the Bohemian chancellor Lobkowitz, which is in the archive at Raudnitz'.²⁸ This is the key document upon which all else in this thesis hangs, and although Gindely gave no other details it has been possible to track it down in the Lobkowitz family archive, which as he says was then at Raudnitz (Raudnice). The note is brief, no more than jottings for personal use, and is a section of one of a number of 'Concepts for various reports and confidential advice to His Majesty, including consultation on the sentences on the leading Bohemian rebels', which were being reviewed by the Imperial privy council in May 1621. The first part, which is the relevant one, reads as follows:²⁹

14 Venceslaus Budouefß
Citauit Defensores. 23 fuit
in Collegio in Erictia.
Fatetur se Coniurasse cum Turno
et Smirzickio tamen non
alio respectu quam Religionis
in Turri Smirzicki Domus
Consensit in Arma
Conscripsit Apologiam cum Aliis
Suleuauit Incolas
Jurauit personaliter feud[an]do

Lobkowitz was fluent in a number of languages, and he apparently wrote in Czech, German or Latin with equal facility. Due to the brevity and limited punctuation of his notes, evidently intended only as an *aide-mémoire*, they require some expansion and interpretation as well as direct translation. Thus *Citauit Defensores* indicates that Budowetz took part in the summoning of the meeting of defensors and other Protestant representatives in May 1618 in defiance of the emperor's order. *23 fuit in Collegio* means that he was in the Collegium in Prague, their meeting place, on 23 May, rather than present at the defenestration, and indeed none of the accounts mention him being there. Further down, *Consensit in Arma* means that he agreed to the rebels taking up arms and recruiting

troops, one of their first acts after the defenestration, while *Conscripsit Apologiam cum Aliis* refers to the fact that he, with others, then wrote the first *Apologia* which the rebels swiftly published to justify their actions. *Suleuauit Incolas* indicates that he 'encouraged the inhabitants', presumably a reference to seeking popular support for the revolt, and *Jurauit personaliter* relates to him swearing an oath, probably the one which the new directors took upon appointment. The second part of the note, on the next page and equally brief, continues to list further offences chronologically, including Budowetz's part in the Bohemian attempts to obstruct the election of Ferdinand as emperor in Frankfurt, his breach of his own feudal vow by voting for Friedrich as the replacement king of Bohemia, and his support for Thurn's invasion of Imperial territory and siege of Vienna. The note concludes with a summary of his proposed sentence.

The vital passage, and the only one to which Gindely could have been referring, is *Fatetur se Coniurasse cum Turno et Smirzickio tamen non alio respectu quam Religionis in Turri Smirzicki Domus*. This means: 'He admits that he made an alliance with Thurn and Smiřický, however in no other respect than religion, in the tower of Smiřický's house.' According to the Oxford Latin Dictionary the verb used can indicate that the alliance was made between enemies, appropriately enough given that Budowetz and Smiřický were both Calvinist activists, whereas Thurn was firmly Lutheran. There is no suggestion that this compact had any connection with a plot to carry out the defenestration, and indeed the stress that it was 'in no other respect than religion' effectively rules that out. Moreover Lobkowitz lists the findings against Budowetz in chronological order, in accordance with the strictly chronological interrogations carried out at the rebels' trials, so that this meeting would have taken place *after* the defenestration, and there is nothing in the wording to support Gindely's assertion that it was on the day before.

Gindely's work in the archive at Raudnitz has itself been the subject of research, establishing that after his visit there in March 1860 he wrote to leading Czech historians to report that he had found long-sought information about the deliberations in Vienna over the sentences proposed for the Bohemian rebels. This was the Lobkowitz document discussed above, the key part of which Gindely cited in his history nine years later, in 1869. After a further eight years, in 1877, when Gindely was working on his fourth volume, including details of the punishments meted out to the leaders of the revolt, he wrote to the Raudnitz archivist asking for the document to be sent on loan to him in Prague. He had, he said,

made a transcript during his visit many years earlier, but 'I lent it to a friend, who has mislaid it'.³⁰

It appears that when Gindely saw the document again he realised that it did not support the inferences he had drawn from it, and hence it is not mentioned at all in his fourth volume, published in 1880, or in his final work, published in 1894, although in both of these he continued to assert the conspiracy thesis. However the meeting in the tower room of Smiřický's house was no longer mentioned and Budowetz disappeared from the trio of plotters, to be replaced by 'a member of the Wchynský [Kinsky] family'.³¹

Instead Gindely turned for support to the records of the trials of the principal rebels, of which there were and are only six extant. According to his 1880 volume, 'the main subject of the questions put to the prisoners was the defenestration, and whether or not it had been planned. Some of the prisoners confessed honestly that it had, and named as the principal instigators Count Thurn, Albrecht Smiřický and a certain Wchynský [Kinsky]'.³² Repeating this assertion in 1894, Gindely added that these trial records 'provide the certainty that the defenestration was planned', and moreover that it was agreed 'on the day before it was carried out'.³³

In fact three of the six men on trial, Michalowitz, Caspar Kapliř and Pietipesky, confined their replies to questions about the defenestration to saying that they were not there and knew nothing, and only Michalowitz named anybody, saying that he had heard afterwards that those who had seized the regents had been Smiřický, Berbisdorf, Wilhelm Lobkowitz and Ulrich Kinsky.³⁴ A fourth, Loss, who was actually present, said little more apart from providing a few brief details of what he had seen. He mentioned Paul Říčan reading out the document, as described by Martinitz, and he noted that 'Ulrich Kinsky was standing by the window', but otherwise he named no-one.³⁵ The fifth, Říčan himself, was only a little more forthcoming with information about the defenestration, as he claimed that 'he was a long way from it, standing at the back by the door, so he did not see it with his own eyes'. He said that he had later heard that Thurn, Smiřický, Kinsky and Berbisdorf had 'laid hands' on the regents, while he had himself seen Smiřický and Berbisdorf throw Fabricius from the window. He also named a few more people, but merely to note that they were present, 'along with many others', again much in line with Martinitz's account. He confirmed that he had read out a document, which he said had been given to him by Thurn, Fels and Ruppá, but he said nothing about a plot,

stating instead that 'neither in the Collegium nor anywhere else was there any talk of throwing anyone out of the window'.³⁶ The sixth man, Fruewein, who was also not present on the day, testified that 'regarding the defenestration, he did not know where it was discussed. He was not there. Had he been asked, he would not have advised it.'³⁷ That is the sum total of the relevant information contained in these trial records.

Five of these six rebels predictably said as little as possible at their trials, seeking to play down their own knowledge and involvement. The exception, Fruewein, provided much more information, particularly about the events in Prague in the days immediately before the defenestration, including two statements which he attributed to Thurn, and which Gindely used to support his conspiracy claim.³⁸ In the first, Thurn had said to some of the other leading figures on the day before the defenestration that 'it would be necessary to make a demonstration against the breaches of the Letter of Majesty'. In view of what actually happened it is easy to conclude that he was hinting at a planned assassination, but his hearers are far more likely to have thought in terms of the demonstrations which were carried out in 1609 and 1611, when the Protestant members of the Estates effectively seized power, albeit temporarily, setting up directorates and recruiting troops with Thurn at their head. From this their reported concern that such an action might 'sow the seeds of a major war' is a logical response. Gindely also utilised Fruewein's report that later on the same day Thurn said to him privately, 'we will have to throw a few people out of the window', although he did not add, as the trial record immediately does, that 'he, Fruewein, took this as a joke'. As noted in Chapter 5, talk of throwing people out of the window occurred regularly at times of political stress in Bohemia, and without the benefit of hindsight there would be little reason to believe that Thurn necessarily meant it any more seriously than Fruewein took it.³⁹

As his last pieces of evidence for a conspiracy Gindely cited two letters written by Schlick after the defeat of the revolt, together with a short testimony by Wilhelm Lobkowitz, from which he drew the conclusion that the planned defenestration 'was discussed and agreed with numerous people long beforehand', rather contradicting his main contention that it was decided by only three men and not until the previous day.⁴⁰ Schlick escaped from Prague, but he only got as far as Upper Lusatia, which by then was occupied by Saxony, and the elector eventually had him returned to stand trial. While in his perilous refuge Schlick made efforts to ingratiate himself with Prince Karl Liechtenstein, who had been appointed governor of Bohemia, initially hoping to secure his

assistance in saving some of his lands from confiscation.⁴¹ In seeking to minimise his part in the revolt Schlick claimed that ‘no more than two things can be held against me’, namely that he had supported the calling of the meeting of the Protestant representatives in May 1618 despite the emperor’s prohibition, and that he had been the author of the second *Apologia* published after the revolt began. He could not, of course, deny that he had been present at the defenestration, as he was too prominent a person for this not to have been well known, so he claimed instead to have attended only under duress:

As for the Prague defenestration, I neither began it nor caused it. On the contrary I was only told of it around an hour and a half beforehand, but although I loyally argued against it I could achieve nothing against the author of the plan. Instead I was told, with great vehemence and accompanied by threats, that by God it had to be so. Anyone who didn’t want to be there could stay away, but should anyone try to prevent it he would himself meet the same fate.

A month later, having received a politely sympathetic but nevertheless noncommittal reply from Liechtenstein, Schlick tried again, as by then it had become apparent that not only his property but also his life were in the gravest danger.⁴² A plea of being intimidated into attending the defenestration by an un-named ‘author of the plan’, as in his first letter, would no longer do. The culprit had to be a person of high standing in the Protestant leadership in order to make the supposed plan and the alleged threats credible, and Thurn, as head of the defensors and a long-standing opponent of the Habsburgs, was the obvious choice, particularly as he was by then safely out of Imperial reach. Moreover Schlick realised that his original explanation of his presence at the defenestration had not exonerated but rather further incriminated him, in that he had admitted attending in full knowledge of what was to occur. ‘Firstly one can ask of me accusingly why, since I knew of the plan, I did not show Christian love and warn the persons in question, and secondly why I did not at least stay at home on that day.’ To his own first question he responded that ‘before that Count Thurn had already blockaded the castle with cavalry and captured the gate’, an occurrence which no other source reports and which begs the question as to what the doubled castle guard were then doing. Furthermore, although Thurn became commander of the estates forces after the defenestration, he held only a civilian official post beforehand, and he had no cavalry at his disposal.

The question of why he had not stayed away was still more difficult. Schlick's explanation was that when Thurn had told him of the plan he also assured him that the issue would be debated in the castle before any action was taken. However when the members of the Estates had reached the ante-chamber and Schlick had tried to argue against violence, so he claimed, Thurn 'immediately stood up from the table and exhorted the many present to go with him into the chancellery, which is what happened'. Schlick thus found himself standing helplessly at the back of the room while 'the ringleaders', who he does not name, carried out the defenestration. Martinitz, on the other hand, identifies Schlick himself as one of nine principals in shouting down the regents in the confrontation, and as one of those who actually seized Slavata and dragged him to the window.⁴³

The other document cited by Gindely concerns Wilhelm Lobkowitz, who a little before the main trials made a short statement dealing only with the defenestration. As he was heading for the castle, 'Fels met me on the bridge, and said to me that a few were going to take a flight out of the window. I asked him where that had been decided, as I knew nothing of it, but he merely shook his head and rode off to join Count Thurn.' When he got to the castle, says Lobkowitz, he had not wanted to go into the chancellery, and had only done so after repeated requests from others, just in time to hear the regents asked about the emperor's letter and Martinitz's refusal to answer. 'At that they all yelled out that they were real villains who ought to be thrown out of the window.' He had then, claims Lobkowitz, taken the other two regents by the hand and led them out into the ante-chamber, so that he had not been present when Martinitz and Slavata were attacked, and nor had he returned into the chancellery afterwards.⁴⁴ Martinitz, however, while confirming that Lobkowitz had indeed been one of those ushering his colleagues out, identifies him as one of the most active and vocal participants before that, as well as naming him specifically among the five who threw him out of the window, and he is likewise listed as such in one of the trial testimonies and by Khevenhüller.⁴⁵

These accounts given by Schlick and Lobkowitz are transparent attempts to exonerate themselves by attributing the defenestration to a plan prepared by others, and it is notable that they identify only Fels, who was dead, and Thurn, who was out of Habsburg reach, thus excluding the possibility of those named contradicting their version of events. Schlick, indeed, does not specifically refer to a plot, effectively attributing everything to Thurn, whereas Lobkowitz implicates Thurn only by allusion to his association with Fels. Both were clearly lying about their

own involvement, and the assassination plan upon which they rely is so convenient that it seems more than probable that they were lying about that too.

Thurn's central part in the whole episode is not in question, but he may well have been more the front man than the principal driving force. In a hierarchical age he and Schlick, as counts, ranked above the other prominent Protestant figures, and furthermore Thurn was the last remaining Protestant holding one of the traditional royal offices in Bohemia. As Fruewein pointed out, he was also 'the head of the defensors', and while he probably held this post mainly because of his status, at 51 and with a career as a soldier and senior officer behind him Thurn had the necessary standing to speak for the Protestant estates.⁴⁶ Hence it would have been normal, appropriate and expected for him to take the lead, both in the assembly called by the defensors and in the confrontation with the regents, but whether he was the real leader as well as the titular head is open to doubt.

Firstly he appears to have been rather pedestrian and undistinguished, at least as a general, and one noted historian has repeatedly labelled him as stupid.⁴⁷ Moreover he was an outsider, coming not from Bohemia but from Styria, a fact emphasised by his poor command of Czech. It may well be significant that during the acceptance process for Ferdinand as successor king of Bohemia in 1617 Thurn's influence on his peers was so limited that he could find only Fels, a fellow Styrian, to support his objections, while even as a general he seems not to have been trusted, as the directorate were quick to bring in an outsider from Germany to share his command in 1618.

Had there been a conspiracy, whether with Thurn or someone else at its head, this would almost certainly have become well known in Prague in the days after the defenestration, and the new directors would have been aware of it. Several of those on trial were ready enough to report what they had heard about other aspects of the revolt, particularly if it might have helped to shift the blame away from themselves, but none did so about a plot, even though it could not have harmed the alleged culprits, as not only Fels but also Smiřický and Ulrich Kinsky were all dead, while as noted Thurn had long since escaped abroad.

One other factor to set against the conspiracy theory is the attack on the secretary Fabricius, possibly because of some personal enmity. This was obviously not part of any plan, as Fabricius was politically insignificant, and conspirators would not have wanted the random murder of a clerk to discredit what was intended as a demonstration of righteous anger against the emperor's evil councillors. Thus it suggests that

it was the mood of the mob, rather than manipulation by an inner cabal, which precipitated not only the defenestration of Fabricius, but of Martinitz and Slavata before him.

None of this proves that there was not a plot, and indeed such negatives are logically incapable of proof. However given the paucity of supporting evidence the plot is at most a hypothesis rather than the proven fact which has been presented in most accounts since Gindely's. It is also possible that there was indeed a plan, more or less formalised, to make a 'demonstration', as Thurn put it, but by arresting rather than by assassinating Martinitz and Slavata. This would have been consistent with Ruppá's final call to action during the confrontation, and with the expectation of the regents themselves.

Why does it matter? Almost everyone agrees that the defenestration ultimately triggered off the Thirty Years War, and this book goes further, arguing that it and the Bohemian revolt which followed from it were not merely the spark to the flame but one of the main substantive causes of the whole conflagration. If the plot theory were correct its origin would have been the deliberate action of perhaps as few as three men. If not, one of the major events in European history developed out of a random incident, an angry meeting at which a mob got out of hand and turned to violence.

8

No Way Back

From revolt to war

Whether the defenestration was pre-planned or not, the truly revolutionary decision was still to be taken. Shortly after Martinitz and Slavata had made their escape from under the window Thurn rode back from the castle into the city in order to quell any alarm, and to avoid possible disorders which might further aggravate the situation, but nevertheless the remaining regents were still nominally in control in Bohemia as the representatives of the royal government.¹ The next step would be critical, but the options for the Protestant leaders were limited. Even if the attempted assassination had been the work of a few irresponsible hotheads most of the main figures had been present and publicly involved, and hence were personally at risk of severe punishment. Moreover to retreat would have completely undermined the stand against the erosion of Protestant freedoms which had been made by calling the assembly in the first place. Consequently there seems to have been little hesitation in proceeding to the seizure of power which would turn a riot into a revolt.

On the following day, Thursday, the Protestant members of the councils of the three constituent towns of Prague, who had not joined the march to the castle, split from their Catholic counterparts and declared their support for the defensors.² On the Friday, says Fruewein, the assembly met and agreed to Ruppa's proposal that they should write 'a letter of apology' to the emperor explaining why the defenestration had taken place, and that meanwhile they should prepare their defences. They went on to elect thirty directors, ten from each estate, lords, knights and citizens, who 'immediately took the oath, swearing with raised fingers, a procedure which the accused [Fruewein] took partly from traditional practice and partly devised himself'.³

That they should have done so is not surprising given the previous history. They had done the same thing twice before in the preceding ten years at times of crisis and confrontation with their king and emperor. Moreover the same key individuals were involved. Of the thirty directors and three military commanders appointed in 1618 half had held office in either 1609 or 1611, many of them in both. At the top of the hierarchy nine of the thirteen lords and commanders had served before, and almost all the real leaders had done so on both occasions, notably Schlick, Thurn, Ruppá and Wilhelm Lobkowitz, while Budowetz had been a director in 1609 and also an active participant in 1611. Of the few newcomers at this level all but one, Smiřický, were close relatives of previous directors, and only among the least influential, the representatives of the cities, were most relatively inexperienced, although Fruewein himself had also served twice before.⁴ This level of experience may well have been one of the principal problems, in that the leading figures in this group of men had twice faced down Emperor Rudolf II and won major concessions from him, while in 1611 they had also largely dictated the terms of Matthias's accession. Against this background the speed with which the estates converted a constitutional crisis into a full-scale armed rebellion certainly suggests over-confidence.

The Saxon ambassador reported back to the elector that there were only a few men of political ability and intellect among the new directors, the remainder being colourless and insignificant personalities, and it is hard to disagree with him.⁵ Schlick, like Thurn, seems to have owed his prominence more to his leading rank as a count than to any political talents, and his employment in drafting the rebels' *Apologia* rather than as head of the directorate doubtless reflects this judgement among his contemporaries. Instead the leading position went to Ruppá, a man of more evident ability who had been active in the Estates during the turmoils of the previous decade, although not in the forefront. Leading a government required different talents to agitating in opposition, and for this Ruppá's administrative experience and knowledge of foreign languages were his main recommendations. Budowetz, on the other hand, was essentially a religious agitator, a firebrand member of the Bohemian Brethren who in his younger days had spent time in the Ottoman Empire, learned Arabic, and used this skill and experience to publish a hostile commentary on Islam. Some historians have referred favourably to the 23-year-old Smiřický, although the evidence for his ability is less well established and he did not live long enough to demonstrate it during the revolt.⁶ For the rest, the more able were probably among the bourgeois members, who did much of the actual administrative

work of the directorate but have left little personal impression in the records, Fruewein being the most notable among them. As for the military commanders, Thurn had served in the Imperial army, rising to the rank of colonel during the Long Turkish War, but although he was an experienced officer he was clearly over-promoted as a general, a fact demonstrated by his service later in the Thirty Years War with the Swedish army, and it was not long before the directors also brought in Count Georg Friedrich of Hohenlohe from Germany to serve with equal rank alongside him. Of Fels little more need be said than that he was, as usual, Thurn's loyal shadow. Unlike the earlier revolt in the Netherlands or the later one in England, no William of Orange or Oliver Cromwell emerged in Bohemia to provide the quality of leadership the situation demanded.

One other weakness which should not be overlooked is the religious tension among the Protestant leaders themselves in a period when, as was noted in Chapter 1, Lutherans and Calvinists were inclined to regard each other as even worse enemies than the Catholics. Smiřický attracted attention early in the revolt by distributing badges which were to be worn by his own co-religionists, thus distinguishing them from Lutherans, 'mere Calvinist childishness', as Schlick later called it, adding disdainfully that he had not accepted one, although he knew that many others had.⁷ Two other directors later testified that they were not trusted and were kept in the dark by their colleagues because they were Lutherans rather than members of the Bohemian Brethren, while Budowetz chose to go to his death on the scaffold without the consolation of religion rather than accept it from a Lutheran pastor.⁸ Ruppa and Fruewein too belonged to the Brethren, which thus had a tight hold on the effective leadership, offering another possible reason why Schlick and Thurn were kept on the political sidelines.

The three immediate priorities were raising troops, looking for allies, and publicising an explanation of their actions, although the directorate also lost no time in ordering the expulsion of the Jesuits from Bohemia, as well as confiscating the property of various of their Catholic opponents, a precedent which would be extensively used in return after the defeat of the revolt.⁹ The explanation took the form not so much of Ruppa's 'letter of apology' but of an extensive self-justification in which all the Protestant grievances were rehearsed, accompanied by an exhausting volume of supporting documentation, which was not only sent to the emperor but promptly and widely published.¹⁰ Numerous letters also passed between Prague and Vienna, and from each to the rulers of neighbouring territories or prospective allies further afield. In these

the Bohemians sought to characterise their revolt as essentially religious, whereas the Imperial side emphasised the secular, political and national aspirations which they saw as underlying this rebellion against law and established authority. There was some truth in both views, but the exchanges were mainly for propaganda purposes and a play for time while the respective sides gathered men and money.¹¹

Thurn once more demonstrated his ability to raise and organise troops quickly, while the directorate called up the militia, theoretically each tenth man from the countryside and every eighth man from the cities, together with cavalrymen to be provided by landowners. Within a month he had an army of some 4000 men, enough to march off in mid-June to coerce the mainly Catholic cities of Budweis and Pilsen to join the revolt. Here he met unexpected resistance from the garrisons, starting the pattern of indecisive military actions which was to dominate the next two years. However Thurn's move south could be seen in Vienna as a threat to the Austrian heartland, thus strengthening the position of those calling for military action against the revolt.

The Imperial response had initially been muted, not least because neither men nor money were available. The government was as always heavily indebted, while its only significant forces were those guarding the Turkish frontier, which were not only distant but also indispensable where they were. Some units did become available with the fortuitous ending of Ferdinand's Uzkok war against the Venetians, although this advantage was balanced out when the duke of Savoy, an inveterate anti-Habsburg, ended his own war in northern Italy, but instead of paying off his small army led by Count Ernst Mansfeld he sent it to assist the Bohemians.

Mansfeld has become notorious as the archetypal Thirty Years War mercenary general with an army for hire to the highest bidder, but while he switched employers several times he nevertheless fought consistently on the anti-Habsburg side, despite being born and brought up as a Catholic. His father was governor of the Habsburg province of Luxembourg for almost fifty years, and in his sixties and long a widower he formed a relationship with a woman of lower rank, but although they did not marry their three children were later legitimised on royal authority. Ernst, the eldest, became the heir after the death of his much older half-brother, but his father's estate was heavily indebted and when he died in 1604 it fell to the Spanish crown, which because of one of its periodic bankruptcies also failed to make the expected provision for Ernst and his siblings. By then Mansfeld had already served eight years in the Imperial army in Hungary during the Long Turkish War,

having started at barely fifteen, but the loss of his inheritance and his subsequent inability to find preferment in the Netherlands embittered him and began the process of turning him from an adherent of the Habsburgs into an enemy.¹²

Peace with the Turks and the truce in the Netherlands left him without military employment, so that he was glad to enlist with Archduke Leopold at the beginning of the Cleves-Jülich conflict in 1609, but he was soon captured and held prisoner. Unable to raise the ransom demanded, and with the Habsburg side unwilling to pay it, he eventually changed sides and took service as a colonel with the Protestant Union's general, Margrave Joachim Ernst of Ansbach. In 1616 the Union allowed Mansfeld to recruit a force of some 4000 men for the duke of Savoy, who with French and Venetian support was engaged in a war with Spain over the succession to the neighbouring Italian duchy of Montferrat, and he continued to serve the duke until the final Spanish withdrawal in June 1618. He and his men were then despatched to Bohemia, where he was engaged by the Estates with a rank equivalent to major-general.¹³

During the early stages of the revolt Khlesl essentially prevaricated, and his correspondence of the period shows him being all things to all men, alternately confrontational or conciliatory depending on whom he was addressing. On the one hand the remaining regents in Prague were advising concessions, while on the other Ferdinand and Archduke Maximilian, Matthias's brother, were pressing for a strong military response. Khlesl himself was still seeking his *Komposition* with the Protestants in the Empire, which would have been further prejudiced by harsh action against the Bohemians, while as chief minister he was more sharply aware than his critics of the severe financial and military limitations facing the government. Although he railed against the perfidy of the 'heretics' he may nevertheless not have seen Bohemia as his most pressing problem, despite which he was clearly aware that losing the province would be highly detrimental to the Habsburgs, and particularly to their prospects of holding on to the Imperial crown when Matthias died.¹⁴ On 18 June, four weeks after the defenestration and when Thurn was already on the march south, under Khlesl's guidance the ageing emperor issued a proclamation calling for an end to the revolt, promising that the Letter of Majesty would be respected, and offering a commission to investigate the underlying problems, but also insisting that troop recruitment should be halted and the militia sent home.¹⁵

Such a limited response was not acceptable to Ferdinand and Maximilian. Until then Ferdinand had adhered to his promise not to

interfere in the government of Bohemia during Matthias's lifetime, and it is also argued that he stood by his own confirmation of the Letter of Majesty, in line with theological advice that such commitments were still binding even when made to 'heretics'.¹⁶ Nevertheless he and his uncle, long-standing enemies of Khlesl, became increasingly frustrated with what they regarded as the cardinal's weak handling of the rebellion, and they decided to take drastic action. Ferdinand first wrote friendly letters to Khlesl, then he and Maximilian paid him a courtesy visit. On 20 July 1618 Khlesl returned the visit, but in an anteroom in the Vienna Hofburg palace he was confronted by three senior military officers, told that he was under arrest, and forced to exchange his purple cardinal's robes for an ordinary priest's cassock. Protest was useless, he was told, as the officers were acting on royal orders, and he was quickly bundled into a waiting coach, in which he was driven day and night to Maximilian's Castle Ambras in distant Tyrol.¹⁷ The Spanish ambassador Oñate was party to this plot, although officially denying all knowledge, but it was a risky venture. Matthias, failing though he was, was still emperor, and he summoned the two archdukes to account for themselves in an uncomfortable interview. Ironically, however, without Khlesl to advise and support him Matthias lacked the energy and resolution to enforce his authority and rescue Khlesl. The emperor lived another eight months, Maximilian less than four, but from this point on Ferdinand increasingly controlled the government.

It was a critical event for the Bohemians, and indeed for European history. Compromise was not completely out of the question for Ferdinand, as he had shown in negotiating the terms of his coronation in Prague a year earlier, but for him it was a last resort, involving wrestling with his religious conscience, whereas for the worldly-wise cardinal it was merely a regrettable fact of political life. Even if the point of no return for the revolt had not yet been reached it was much closer than it had been. Military preparations were promptly speeded up, and with the aid of Spanish money and generals, Counts Bucquoy and Dampierre, a first Imperialist army entered Bohemia during August and a second one set out from Vienna before the end of the month.

The military history of the following two years need only be recounted briefly, as it was not this which determined the eventual fate of the revolt, although it imposed great suffering on the unfortunate people of Bohemia who were caught up in it. By the autumn of 1618 both sides had recruited significant although not vast forces, reportedly around 15,000 strong, which were fairly evenly matched both in numbers and resources, or perhaps more accurately lack of resources,

particularly the artillery necessary to capture strategic cities. Hence neither was able to establish dominance or strike a decisive blow, and the fortunes of war swung to and fro without reaching a conclusion. Mansfeld arrived in Bohemia in 1618 just in time to prevent the Imperialists from making a determined advance on Prague, following which both sides preferred to spend the autumn manoeuvring, skirmishing and ravaging the countryside rather than risk a major battle. In this Thurn fared rather better than the Imperialists, while Mansfeld besieged Pilsen, which he captured in late November after a seven-week siege, a feat for which he was promptly placed under the Imperial ban by Emperor Matthias. This marked the end of the campaigning season, leaving the troops to find their winter quarters and the governments to pursue the conflict through diplomacy and propaganda until military action could be resumed in the spring.

During the late autumn the Moravians, led by Zierotin, Liechtenstein and Cardinal Dietrichstein, and thus representing both sides of the religious divide, attempted to mediate between the Imperial government and the rebels. The horrors of war had already left their marks on the country as they travelled through to Vienna and Prague on their mission, and they made a deep impression on Zierotin, as he recorded. The would-be peacemakers met with an unfriendly reception in Prague, where the directors refused to consider negotiations unless all Imperialist troops first withdrew from Bohemia. Zierotin's own peace proposals were met with scorn by Ruppá. 'It was as clear as the sun', he was reported as saying, 'that the Moravians had only come to Prague in order to be able later, like Pilate, to wash their hands of the affair and claim innocence over the outcome.'¹⁸ They fared no better in Vienna, where although Matthias and Ferdinand remained willing to confirm the Letter of Majesty they stipulated that before negotiations could begin the Bohemians must dissolve their own forces. As neither side was prepared to meet the other's conditions no further progress was possible.

The revolt had so far been an entirely Bohemian affair, but one watched anxiously in the other territories of the Bohemian crown. Only the Silesians sent any practical help, a small force of nominally 2000 infantry and 1000 cavalry, which arrived in October 1618, but even this was hedged around with strict conditions about its employment for purely defensive purposes.¹⁹ The Moravian Estates, while attempting to mediate, also prepared to defend themselves if necessary, mobilising their establishment of 2000 cavalry and 3000 infantry in the summer of 1618, but nevertheless maintaining a strict neutrality towards the war in progress across their border. As they continued to ignore all appeals to

join the revolt Thurn finally resolved the issue by invading Moravia with a substantial army in April 1619. He met with no resistance, and indeed the Protestant nobility were more than ready to join the Bohemians. Most of the Catholics, led by Liechtenstein and Dietrichstein, were also acquiescent, motivated partly by anxiety to save their property and partly by defeatism arising from the poor Imperialist military showing in the autumn.

The only other practical military help for the Bohemians came from Bethlen Gabor, since 1613 the Calvinist prince of Transylvania, then an independent principality although nevertheless a tributary of the Ottoman Empire. Bethlen had his own ambitions and reasons for becoming involved, and to the extent that his interests coincided with theirs he provided valuable assistance to the Protestant side in the early part of the Thirty Years War, but he proved to be an unreliable ally, prone to concluding truces with the Habsburgs whenever he faced pressures elsewhere or when his own objectives had been achieved for the time being.

In the spring of 1619 Ferdinand was almost equally isolated militarily, while the forces he had put into the field with Spanish assistance the previous autumn had fared badly. Thurn, following on from his bloodless triumph in Moravia, took advantage of the situation to march into Austria, and by May he had the capital itself under siege. In early June there was a change of fortune. Some 7000 Spanish troops were making their way from Flanders to join the Imperialists in Bohemia, but when Mansfeld tried to intercept them he was himself caught by Bucquoy, who defeated him heavily near the town of Záblatí.²⁰ This was the first significant Imperialist victory and one which immediately caused the Bohemian directorate to recall Thurn, so that the siege of Vienna was lifted.

The respite was short-lived, as in August Bethlen launched his attack through Habsburg Hungary towards Pressburg, which he captured in October to bring him within striking distance of Vienna. Bucquoy was called back to the defence, and hotly pursued by Thurn he made a hazardous withdrawal over the Danube at Ulrichskirchen, not far from Vienna, but was unable to prevent Thurn and Bethlen joining forces to besiege the city for a second time. Again the siege was abandoned, as towards the end of November Bethlen heard of a diversionary Polish foray into Transylvania, and this and the approach of winter were sufficient to send him home. Thurn, short of money and artillery, his troops ill paid, ill disciplined, and ill from various pestilences, had little choice but to follow suit, bringing 1619 to an end for military purposes.

For what it is worth, the Bohemians probably had the best of the fighting during 1618 and 1619, while Ferdinand himself ran a serious risk of capture during the sieges of Vienna, having courageously or foolishly stayed in the city throughout the first and returned to it during the second. Nevertheless the hardships of the campaign, and epidemics in particular, had taken a heavy toll on their forces, added to which the Bohemian directorate sadly neglected their army, failing to provide adequate pay, equipment or winter quarters, so that the soldiers and their families suffered terribly from lack of money, provisions and proper accommodation in the bad weather. It is reported that one regiment lost 85 per cent of its strength from hunger and cold, some 3500 men, as well as a similar number of their dependents.²¹ The result was an army which had to be rebuilt almost from scratch in the spring of 1620, just as the Habsburg side was beginning to assemble formidable allies, and the collapse into defeat at the battle of the White Mountain in November of that year stems at least in part from that fact.

The principal problem was that the estates were willing enough to embark collectively on a dangerous revolt, but not sufficiently willing to pay for it individually, while most of the participants clearly did not fully appreciate the personal risk to property and life that they were running if the revolt failed. Hence after the first wave of support taxation was thereafter imposed reluctantly and paid even more reluctantly, particularly by the ruling classes themselves. Smiřický was one of the few prepared to go further, personally financing a regiment and going into the field with it until his death on campaign in November 1618. For most of the rest, taxation was something to be shifted as far as possible on to the lower orders, an approach which added to the latter's direct burdens of war. These included conscription into the militia, rising prices and food shortages due to diversion of manpower from the fields, together with the additional consumption of large numbers of soldiers and their dependents, as well as foraging, looting and worse by the passing armies, all of which fell most heavily on the common people. The revolt had not originated at that level but had been imposed from the top, initiated by an Estates assembly dominated by the nobility and led by the higher aristocracy, and in which the citizens of the towns had only very limited influence, while the country people were not represented at all. Protestant religious aspirations may well have been shared by the majority, but the cost soon became too high, and by the time the revolt moved into its most critical period popular support had long since faded.

The Bohemians' search for allies in the Habsburg lands can also be summarised briefly, as although much time and effort was expended

on it, and it has been much discussed subsequently, in the end it had as little influence on the outcome as the military campaigns of the first two summers. The modest contribution from Silesia has been noted, while although Moravia was eventually compelled into the field by Thurn's invasion its participation was half-hearted and not large enough to make a significant difference. Politically, the lands of the Bohemian crown did eventually join into a formal confederation, signed on 31 July 1619, and although efforts to bring in Upper and Lower Austria failed, treaties of association with these territories were signed soon afterwards.²² The lengthy constitution adopted by the confederation is of considerable interest from the standpoint of political theory, as are the ideas of the principal authors which it contains, but analysis of these is beyond the scope of the current book. The most significant element in terms of practical consequences is the role which it allotted to a future king, as discussed below. In other respects the confederation was too late and too politically ineffective to make any real difference to the course of the revolt. The main contribution made by the other Habsburg lands, including Hungary, was to deny their resources to the Imperialist side, neither making available the limited military forces which they controlled nor providing grants of taxation to shore up the desperate Imperial finances and to fund recruiting against the Bohemians.

A king for Bohemia

As long as Matthias lived the Bohemians could argue, at least to themselves, that Ferdinand was not yet really king of Bohemia, only king in waiting, but when he died on 20 March 1619 this convenient dissimulation was no longer tenable, and they had to choose between accepting Ferdinand after all or finally refusing him.²³ The directors had made their preparations long before, as in mid-November 1618 a group led by Ruppá and Schlick privately contacted the Palatine representatives in Prague and informed them that they had already drafted a document stripping Ferdinand of the crown, although they did not intend to publish it before Matthias's death, and they also broached the possibility of offering the throne to their elector.²⁴ This was the start of the process which led eventually to the formal deposition of Ferdinand from the throne on 22 August 1619, and the election of Friedrich V of the Palatinate in his place four days later.²⁵ That decision, and Friedrich's subsequent acceptance of the election, was the key turning point, the step which meant that there was truly no way back. It was also the point at which the revolt ceased to be an internal matter in the Habsburg lands

and started to involve powers in the Empire and beyond in a more direct way, and which ultimately led to the extension of the limited war in Bohemia into a European conflict.

A structural problem had been foreseen almost from the outset of the revolt, and it fell into two parts. Firstly, what sort of a monarchy was there to be in the future, and secondly who was to be the monarch? The parallel with the revolt in the Netherlands, where they had done away with monarchy altogether, was as obvious to the Bohemians themselves as to contemporary observers and later historians, but so was the consequent war, which had by then lasted some fifty years and was about to resume when the truce expired in 1621. Ten years earlier Zierotin had expressed the more general feeling of the time, even among radical elements, that some kind of prince was still necessary, and this assumption was the starting point for most of those involved in drawing up the constitution for the planned confederation of the lands of the Bohemian crown.²⁶ Nevertheless they envisaged a completely different form of kingship from the Habsburg model, and indeed their concept was some two hundred years ahead of its time, resembling an early form of constitutional monarchy in which the role of the prince was greatly reduced but effective power resided not with the people but with the small controlling upper class.

The Act of Confederation set out a federal state constitution, but it took the form of an Estates oligarchy, at the head of which stood a king. It was however to be an explicitly elective monarchy for Bohemia and the associated provinces, in which the king's role would be carefully regulated. The real power would lie with the Estates, who conferred the crown on the king on licence, as it were, and any references suggestive of the former rights of inheritance were carefully avoided, while the designation of a successor during a king's lifetime was forbidden. Moreover the king was bound both by the terms of the confederation and by the legal practices of the individual provinces. He was not to establish any military strongholds without the consent of the Estates, he was to appoint officials in accordance with the proposals of the Estates, and in all other important matters he was to be restricted by the Estates. A multiple right of resistance gave the Estates a legal entitlement to oppose a king who acted contrary to these provisions, and the defensors had the authority to suspend a king. The position of a king of Bohemia would not in future be one of power, as it had been reduced to an essentially nominal role as an honorific figurehead.²⁷

Although this constitution was only formally agreed a few weeks before the processes of deposition and election were put into effect it

had been under discussion for a long time beforehand, during which the search for a suitable candidate was proceeding in parallel. There was, however, a logical difficulty. On the one hand the Bohemian estates wanted a king who would be little more than a cipher internally, but on the other hand they needed him to be of sufficient personal standing to impress the world externally. Moreover he should already be in possession of a substantial territory, with the resources to support his new kingdom against its enemies. Few such people, it might be thought, would be ready to accept the Bohemian tone on the terms offered, but the rank and title of king were considerable attractions to the status-conscious dukes and electors of the day. The closest parallel was the elective monarchy in Poland, weak although not as powerless as proposed for Bohemia, which had experienced little difficulty in the past in attracting a choice of high-ranking candidates.

In this case there were other problems too. Whoever was elected would find himself immediately caught up in a war against the emperor, admittedly not the most powerful prince in Europe at the time, given the range of problems facing him in his own territories, but nevertheless too formidably well connected in the Empire and beyond to be taken lightly. Matthias's death added another complication, in that although Ferdinand was only a candidate for the succession rather than already emperor, the whole question of the forthcoming Imperial election confused the jockeying for position around the two crowns. Nor could the religious issue be underestimated. Apart from the few real zealots most European princes were anxious to limit religious dissension in their own realms, so that becoming involved in the hottest dispute of the time, that in Bohemia, posed a considerable risk at home. Those with strong religious convictions, whether Catholic or Protestant, also had to consider how acceptable they would be to, and how they would deal with, the other party in Bohemia, not to mention the divide between the Lutherans and the Brethren. Not least was the problem of legitimacy in accepting a crown offered by rebels, a much greater issue for seventeenth-century princes than for their successors in subsequent eras more inclined to *Realpolitik*.

Various names were canvassed as the debate proceeded, whether in aristocratic coteries in Prague or in the ante-rooms of princely courts across Europe, but few seemed to be credible possibilities. Christian IV of Denmark, Bethlen Gabor, and even Maximilian of Bavaria were approached, but these contacts progressed no further, while the king of Poland instructed his son to decline a Bohemian invitation to become a contender.²⁸ One of the oddest features of the election was that

none of the three remaining possible candidates declared themselves openly, or even unambiguously in private to their supporters among the Bohemians, so that caucuses had to press the claims of their preferred choices without any confirmation as to whether the individual concerned would actually accept if elected.

The most evident contender was Duke Charles Emmanuel I of Savoy, whose territories, mostly in modern north-west Italy, stretched from the Mediterranean to the Swiss border, with his capital at Turin. In his late fifties and already a ruling duke for approaching forty years, Charles Emmanuel had long been pursuing any opportunity which might bring him the title of king, in order, as he put it, to 'lift Ourselves out of the crowd of the other Italian princes'. His largest ambition, however, was to contest the Imperial election when Matthias died, and to this end Mansfeld was sent first not to Prague but to the Palatinate to offer his troops, half of whom Savoy would continue to pay if the elector would pay the other half, for service in Bohemia. This move was designed to win Protestant favour, and Mansfeld was accordingly instructed to draw attention in Heidelberg to the duke's merits as a prospective emperor, but Savoy's military involvement was to be kept secret to avoid prematurely disturbing the more peaceful relationship recently established with the Habsburgs. Thus the Bohemians themselves did not know who was paying half of Mansfeld's men until April of the following year, allowing the Palatinate to take all the credit and to employ this in support of their elector's own prospective interest in the Bohemian crown.²⁹

It was not until January 1619 that Charles Emmanuel told the Palatine representatives that he wanted the Bohemian throne for himself, not instead of but in addition to the Imperial one, as 'without something stable in the Empire it seemed to him he could not uphold the greatness, dignity and power proper to such a position, since his states are as far from Germany as they are'. He backed this claim with a stick and a carrot, ceasing his payments to Mansfeld in March but holding out the prospect of much larger subsidies in the future, as well as of alternative great opportunities for Friedrich, the Palatine elector, after he himself became emperor. With Mansfeld and the Bohemians desperate for money and the matter made much more urgent by the death of Matthias he was in a strong negotiating position, so that Friedrich instructed his representative in Prague to inform his supporters that he was not a candidate, while a group around Ruppá agreed to vote for Charles Emmanuel, subject to him fulfilling his promises of support and providing guarantees of religious tolerance in accordance with

the Letter of Majesty.³⁰ Christian of Anhalt, on behalf of the Palatinate, accordingly made an agreement with the duke on 28 May 1619 in Rivoli, which committed the latter to finance a larger force under Mansfeld in Bohemia. The duke not only promised to provide 100,000 ducats a month himself, to be paid quarterly for up to three years, but to secure a similar sum from Venice for the support of the revolt, provided that he was not himself attacked by Spain. He was also to pay substantial sums of money to the Palatinate and its fellow Calvinist territory of Ansbach, which were to raise an army to assist the Bohemians, while in return the elector of the Palatinate would direct support in the Bohemian election towards Savoy.³¹

Both sides were playing fast and loose. The sums of money promised by Charles Emmanuel were vastly in excess of the resources of his duchy, as well as conditional upon him actually being elected, and in the event he did not pay. The Palatine lobby were probably confident that he would not be elected anyway, even if they voted for him, but by the middle of July Anhalt had stopped even pretending to support him and was openly working for the election of Friedrich. Mansfeld and the Savoy agent in Prague were actively canvassing too, however, and to counter their efforts the Palatine party concentrated on the duke's principal weakness in Bohemia, the fact that he was a Catholic and had not in the past been noted for his religious tolerance. Not surprisingly, given the background to the revolt, this ultimately proved fatal for his chances of election.³²

A more realistic candidate – apart from his own unwillingness – was Elector Johann Georg I of Saxony. Unlike distant Savoy, Saxony bordered directly on to northern Bohemia and Lusatia, and it was not only one of the larger and more powerful territories of the Empire, but also its leading Lutheran principality. This made the elector a natural choice for Schlick and a group of like-minded Bohemian Lutherans, but not for the members of the Brethren. Both Saxony and Johann Georg himself were strongly antipathetic towards Calvinists, and moreover the elector was no more inclined than the Habsburgs towards the political rights and freedoms of the Estates. More significant still was Johann Georg's constitutionalist outlook and support for the concepts and institutions of the Empire, which had kept him and his predecessors at odds with the Palatine-led Protestant opposition during the preceding decades. He saw himself as duty bound to the emperor, and he had no time for rebels. Nevertheless he seems to have been as attracted as others by the idea of a crown and the title of king, and in particular to have felt that if he himself did not have them no-one else should either, which may

have given his Bohemian supporters sufficient encouragement not to abandon him as a prospect.

Hence when Schlick visited Dresden in late June 1619, officially in order to plead yet again for Saxon support for the revolt in the form of money and munitions, he was privately more interested in pursuing the question of the crown. In an audience with Johann Georg and in the presence of the Saxon council he told the elector that the Bohemian estates were not minded to accept Ferdinand as their king, thus confirming information the Saxon agent in Prague had already gathered. Schlick's objective was clearly to prepare the ground for the elector to be a candidate for the throne, but how explicit he was is not known. On his return to Prague he reported to the directors that his mission had been completely successful, praising the elector as an 'Estates-friendly' prince, but he could hardly have said otherwise if he was to further his aim of securing a Lutheran candidate to oppose the Calvinist aspirations of his colleagues Rupp and Budowetz.³³

If Johann Georg was the obvious candidate for the Lutherans then Friedrich, the Calvinist elector of the Palatinate, was the corresponding natural preference for the members of the Bohemian Brethren. Although his main territory was far away in central and south-west Germany, with its capital in Heidelberg, the large detached Upper Palatinate also bordered on Bohemia, while the Palatinate as a whole was, like Saxony, one of the leading territories of the Empire. The 22-year-old elector himself, however, was something of an unknown quantity, as despite having inherited at the age of fourteen he had been subject first to a regency and then to the tutelage of Christian of Anhalt. He had married well, though, to Elizabeth Stuart, the daughter of James I of England, and both this important political connection and the attractive image of the romantic young couple added to his appeal as a candidate. Approaches to him had been made by some of the leading Bohemian rebels at an early stage, but he had responded cautiously, as his council were well aware of the risks surrounding the Bohemian crown, while they later avoided any open indication of a Palatine candidature because of the dealings with Savoy.

In a contemporary pamphlet, the *Acta consultatoria Bohemica*, reprinted in the *Theatrum Europaeum*, the arguments for and against possible candidates for the crown which were circulating at the time in Prague were summarised.³⁴ The duke of Savoy, the elector of Saxony and King Christian IV of Denmark were also considered, but by far the strongest case was made for Friedrich of the Palatinate. He was a modest and sympathetic character; he was rich and could provide plenty

of money; he would undoubtedly have the support of England, France, the United Provinces, Sweden, Venice, the Swiss confederation, Hungary and Transylvania; he was director of the Protestant Union, which was wealthy and had full power in Germany; he was in good standing with Saxony and especially with Bavaria, so that there would be no threat from that quarter; in short there could be no one better. 'And', his supporters added, 'should anyone object that his religion [as a Calvinist] is questionable, the answer is that there is no known instance of anyone being led astray by this lord', with the further observation that at his court in Heidelberg there were no more than three members of the nobility who belonged to his religion, as virtually everyone else subscribed to the Augsburg Confession. Seldom, says Golo Mann, have more illusions been assembled in a single argument.³⁵

When it came to the election only the Bohemians took part in the vote, the other provinces being left to confirm their agreement with the choice on the following day, 27 August, when the decision was announced by an artillery salvo. The Brethren, it is said, had outmanoeuvred Schlick and his party by sending them off to Dresden to lobby the Saxons while holding the election in their absence, but the vote would have been decisive in any case.³⁶ Johann Georg received only eight votes, and the duke of Savoy none, as the overwhelming majority supported Friedrich. The big question was whether he would in fact accept, and it took over a month before this was answered. Whether by accident or design, Christian of Anhalt, who was governor of the Upper Palatinate, was entertaining his young master there, well away from the more cautious council in Heidelberg, when the news arrived from Prague, and it seems that over the course of the next few days he calmed Friedrich's fears and convinced him that it was his religious duty to accept. Nevertheless the latter made no official response, maintaining that he was still taking advice, which did indeed flood in from all sides. The Catholic elector of Mainz, the Protestant elector of Saxony, and many others, including Friedrich's relative Duke Maximilian of Bavaria all warned him not to accept the crown. Maximilian's observations are worth quoting, because although he was ultimately the biggest winner from Friedrich's later misfortune his analysis and advice were sound.

In a letter of 24 September Maximilian argued that the disturbances in Bohemia posed greater dangers for Friedrich's own house, for many provinces and principalities, for the Empire, and indeed for virtually the whole of Christendom, than most were inclined to believe. The greatest danger of all, however, awaited Friedrich himself if he accepted

the supposedly elective crown, particularly as it was known that the Bohemians intended to attach stringent conditions limiting its powers. Moreover it should alarm him that the first and only ally of the Bohemian Estates was the prince of Transylvania, who was to all intents and purposes a vassal of the Turks. He should also recognise that the House of Austria, a mighty dynasty, would not accept the loss of Bohemia, but would take any opportunity to revenge themselves, and such opportunities could occur unexpectedly almost overnight. Furthermore it was not long since these selfsame Bohemian Estates had elected and crowned Ferdinand as their king, and it would be contrary to all lawful practice in Christian lands for him now to be deprived of the throne and for another prince to accept it. If that were permissible, then in the future whenever a dispute over religious or political matters arose the same could happen to Friedrich himself, or indeed to Maximilian or any other prince. Finally there was unfortunately a widespread perception among the Protestant estates of the Empire that the Catholics were planning their destruction. This was false, as he implored Friedrich to believe.³⁷ All this Maximilian supported with much detailed argument, but from Friedrich he received only a polite acknowledgement and a brief refutation. He had not, he said, sought the Bohemian crown, but as it had nevertheless been offered to him this must be through divine providence. Thus he could not merely reject out of hand the vocation to which God had called him.³⁸

It was in any case too late, as on 25 September a conclusion was reached in the elector's council in Heidelberg. Here too there were great reservations about Friedrich accepting election, and many of the councillors sought to persuade him to first seek the approval of the king of England, a tactic which would have put off the decision, whereas Christian argued against delay and for immediate acceptance. He carried the day, and Friedrich promptly wrote to inform his father-in-law of his intention to accept and to seek his support, despite the fact that the English king had made clear his opposition from the outset, when a Palatine representative had first disclosed the possibility to him at New Year 1619.³⁹ Two days later Friedrich's ambassador went to Prague to inform the Bohemians of his agreement, but with the request that this should be kept secret until an official Bohemian delegation brought him the formal offer. Far from supporting the decision, James I was openly critical and angry, but this had no more effect than Maximilian's pleadings or the advice from many other princes.

It was another month before Friedrich reached his new kingdom, making a triumphal entry into Prague on 31 October, where he and his

queen were separately crowned during the following week. The events were celebrated with all the traditional pomp and display, and the royal couple were escorted by guards in splendid uniforms, quite unlike those of their unpaid and hungry fellow soldiers suffering in the war to the south. The estates too turned out in force, decked in their finery like aristocrats with a rosy future in their grasp, rather than yesterday's men enjoying their last hurrah. For now their triumph and their self-esteem were encapsulated in a commemorative medal struck for the coronation and inscribed 'Friedrich, King by the Grace of God and the Estates'.⁴⁰

The best that can be said of Friedrich is that he looked the part, as did his wife, who was considered to have inherited the beauty of her grandmother Mary, Queen of Scots. A recent biographer calls for 'a revision of the prevailing view of Frederick as an Early Modern prototype of princely incompetence' and 'an insipid character totally lacking in abilities', but he himself calls him a 'narrow-minded obstinate man', and there seems little reason to change the long-standing historical assessment of his character.⁴¹ Had he been the duke of a minor German territory in peaceful times Friedrich would probably have got by well enough, occupying himself with the pleasures of court life, hunting, and fathering large numbers of children, while leaving the government in the hands of his officials. As elector Palatine, at the head of the leading principality on one side of the great political and religious divide in the Empire, and even more as the new king of a country fighting for its existence, he was completely out of his depth. Far from finding a William of Orange – although Friedrich was his grandson – the Bohemians elected a nonentity.

Drawn into the centre of the action, he demonstrated an unfortunate combination of limited perception and reckless aspiration, aggravated by an unshakeable belief in his own rectitude and an obstinate refusal to contemplate concessions or compromises, in which he was sustained by an equally unshakeable conviction that he was doing God's will.⁴² Thus he responded to the Bohemian Estates, as he had to Maximilian, that as his election had taken place 'through God's unquestionable providence and divine ordinance' he must accept, 'in order not to oppose the will of the Almighty'.⁴³ Despite his assertion that he had not sought the crown, however, he had been contemplating the possibility for at least nine months, as he told one of his councillors in December 1618 that the main problem for him was that the Bohemians would not guarantee that it would be passed on to his posterity.⁴⁴ After his election he made this a priority, and despite the firm stipulation in the new constitution that a successor could not be named during the lifetime of an incumbent

he persuaded the Estates to designate his eldest son as heir apparent in April 1620.

Assessing Friedrich's own part in Palatine policy-making is hampered by the fact noted by his biographer, that 'he did not often take up the pen himself', so that his correspondence, other than his frequent and essentially personal letters to his wife, was drafted by councillors and secretaries. Thus 'the emphasis on confessional considerations varied over time and according to the audience, as the situation demanded', reflecting the carefully political approach of his more able and worldly-wise advisers. In Bohemia he was little more than a figurehead, deprived of effective power by the constitution and obliged to appoint a government comprising primarily the former directors, in which there was no place for any of his Palatine councillors. Friedrich's personal significance in the history of the war reduces to his decision to accept the Bohemian crown in the first place, coupled with his subsequent stubborn persistence in seeking total vindication and restitution during a decade of exile and war. 'Concern for his honour', says his biographer, 'rendered him nearly incapable of making peace on anyone's terms but his own.'⁴⁵

Later mockingly known as the 'Winter King', Friedrich passed that one winter pleasantly in his new capital, celebrating the Christmas season as though still at home and at peace in Heidelberg, before setting off in the spring to Moravia and Silesia for homage ceremonies, more festivities, and an attempt to drum up money for the war. The welcome in Prague had already worn thin, as even there the hardships of war became apparent. Shortage of money progressed towards financial collapse, prompting an attempt to alleviate the problem by devaluing the currency and increasing the number of gulden minted from a mark (a unit of weight) of silver from 19 to 27. This served only to aggravate the inflation which was already taking hold in the Habsburg lands, as well as in much of the wider Empire, foreshadowing the collapsing currencies of the following years. In these circumstances the new queen's extravagance attracted criticism, as did her flighty English manners and her inability to speak German, let alone Czech.

Perversely, Friedrich's religious affiliation quickly became a further source of tension, as even the Bohemian Brethren, although Calvinist influenced, did not subscribe to the strict Puritan brand of Calvinism brought in by the Palatine party. This was most dramatically demonstrated when Friedrich allowed himself to be persuaded by his court preacher Abraham Scultetus that he could not celebrate Christmas

surrounded by 'graven images', as a result of which a veritable iconoclastic onslaught was launched on Prague's principal church, the St Vitus cathedral. Pictures, statues, shrines containing holy relics, graves of saints, even the crucifix over the high altar, were removed and in most cases destroyed, including many art treasures from earlier times, while other churches, among them the Jesuit church in Prague Old Town, were similarly 'cleansed'. The great majority of the population were Lutheran, and these excesses caused deep resentment, adding to a growing perception of Palatine rule as foreign in both religious and political terms. Even more significantly, news of these events quickly reached Germany, where it was particularly badly received by some of the Lutheran princes, further reducing their already limited sympathy for Friedrich in his new and controversial role as king of Bohemia.⁴⁶

The Palatines in their turn quickly realised the political problems in Bohemia. Soon after Friedrich's arrival his councillor Camerarius expressed his concern about the dire state of the finances and administration, and the king himself began to realise how dependent he was on the Estates. The appointment of senior officials could only be made in accordance with their nominations, so that his experienced Palatine staff had no opportunity to become involved in the government, while distance and difficult communications hampered their work in both Heidelberg and Prague. Instead Ruppa became chancellor, and other posts had to be filled by lesser men from the directorate. Money was predictably the biggest problem, as the Estates were disinclined to vote the additional taxes needed to pay for the army, while attempts to establish a unified system quickly foundered on the sensitivities of Silesia and the other provinces, who insisted that each should raise its own money. The result was that the troops went largely unpaid, arrears quickly accumulated, and in spring and summer of 1620 pay mutinies broke out among the troops in the Bohemian camp. Friedrich sought to help with money from the Palatinate, but that too was soon in difficulties, far in arrears with its contribution to the Protestant Union, and with debts mounting and its credit resources exhausted.

Sweden, Denmark, Venice and the United Provinces all recognised Friedrich as king of Bohemia, but apart from the Dutch they offered no practical assistance. The latter did send a little money, and in 1620 some 10 per cent of Friedrich's troops were being paid for by them or were in fact Dutch regiments, but they were in no position to do more as the renewal of their own war with Spain was to be expected when the twelve-year truce expired in April 1621.

A new emperor

A key factor driving the Bohemians' search for a new king was the date set for the Imperial election following Matthias's death. This was to take place in Frankfurt am Main on 28 August 1619, and were Ferdinand to become emperor the prestige surrounding the office would make it even more difficult to justify to the world his abrupt removal from the Bohemian throne. Moreover as long as Ferdinand remained formally king of Bohemia he also remained an elector, and as such able to vote for himself as emperor. In the event the deposition was carried through in time, although with a mere six days to spare, and Friedrich was elected in Prague four days later, but the news had not reached Frankfurt by the time the electors cast their votes.

Every emperor for almost two hundred years had been a Habsburg, as despite all opposition, manoeuvring and blocking attempts a member of that family had always emerged successful. On this occasion too ideas of depriving the Habsburgs of the throne had been canvassed well in advance, not only by the Bohemians but also, and independently, by the Palatines. They had, however, experienced the same problem which the Bohemians themselves later faced in looking for a king, that of finding an alternative candidate who was both credible and willing. With Ferdinand once accepted as king of Bohemia in 1617 the long-standing situation was maintained whereby the Imperial electoral college had a four to three split in favour of the Catholics, and therefore no member of any other religion could hope to secure a majority. Only Duke Maximilian of Bavaria, the moving force of the Catholic League, seemed to have the standing that might persuade the three ecclesiastical electors to switch their support from the Habsburgs, so paradoxically it was to him that the Calvinist Palatines turned, their position at the head of the Protestant Union notwithstanding. It was well known that Maximilian had his own differences with the Habsburgs, so in February 1618 Friedrich himself, not yet king of Bohemia, went to Munich to try to persuade him to stand. Maximilian gave him no encouragement, although he enigmatically did not rule a candidature out.⁴⁷ More optimistically still, some of the Bohemians had floated the idea that the elector of Saxony might be persuaded to put his hat into the ring despite the adverse religious balance of votes, but they had received no support in Dresden.

Without a serious candidate to put forward as the election approached, the Palatines tried instead to have it postponed on the grounds that the situation in Bohemia should be resolved first, while

there were even thoughts of employing force to prevent the electoral meeting taking place. The Catholic electors, and particularly the Imperial chancellor, the archbishop-elect of Mainz, rejected this argument completely, holding firmly to the date which had been set in accordance with the electoral procedure laid down in the Golden Bull of 1356. In July, with time running out, the Bohemians approached the archbishop with a long and learned exposition of how the Golden Bull and numerous precedents from the last three hundred years established that an elector who no longer exercised *de facto* power in his own lands had thereby lost the right to vote. This, they said, was Ferdinand's situation in Bohemia, but they were rebuffed with a brief, cool dismissal of their claim.⁴⁸ They did not give up even then, and as the electors gathered in Frankfurt a delegation from the Bohemian Estates arrived in nearby Hanau to demand Ferdinand's exclusion from the electoral college and their own admission in his place. Ferdinand objected successfully, thus establishing his position as the legally recognised king of Bohemia for the purposes of the election. Interestingly, the point has been made that had Friedrich been recognised in his stead this would have changed the religious balance in favour of the Protestants, but it would also have been in breach of the Imperial constitution as he would then have had two votes, those of both Bohemia and the Palatinate.⁴⁹

Ferdinand had started on his way to Frankfurt almost as soon as the lifting of Thurn's first siege of Vienna had freed him to travel, and the three ecclesiastical electors also attended the meeting in person, whereas the electors of Brandenburg, Saxony and the Palatinate sent only representatives. Ferdinand discreetly took no part in the debate about his own standing as an elector, but in any case only the Palatine delegate supported the rebels. Thus when the election was held in the chapel of St Bartholomew's cathedral Ferdinand received not only his own vote on behalf of Bohemia, but also those of Cologne, Mainz, Trier, Brandenburg and Saxony. The Palatine representative voted initially for the duke of Bavaria, despite having received no indication that he was willing to be a candidate, but thereafter, showing a somewhat surprising respect for tradition, he switched his vote to Ferdinand in order to achieve the customary unanimity.

9

The Search for Allies

Bohemian disappointments

With Europe supposedly poised for war in 1618, the striking thing is not how quickly allies rallied to the Bohemians and the emperor respectively, but how anxious the majority proved to be to keep out of the conflict. As the advantage swung back and forth between the two evenly matched sides during 1618 and 1619 it became increasingly obvious that neither was likely to triumph alone, but that victory would probably go to the first to succeed in bringing powerful allies into the field. In the event it took a full two years, involving long-drawn-out diplomacy and eventually outright bribery, before Emperor Ferdinand II was able to secure the outside support which was ultimately decisive, while the Bohemians, despite equal efforts, never found more substantial external allies than Bethlen Gabor of Transylvania, Mansfeld's hired army, and the limited resources of the Palatinate which came with Friedrich's election as their king.

Initially the Imperial side found assistance even harder to come by. Spain did provide some money and a few experienced officers, but the contribution was limited, even though Archduke Albrecht of the Netherlands pressed for more Spanish help against the Bohemians from an early stage. Philip III and his government in Madrid were reluctant to become directly involved, or to commit further resources to what they saw as a diversion from their first priority, the expected resumption of their war with the Dutch when the twelve-year truce expired. Nor could the pope, the notably anti-Habsburg Paul V, be persuaded to make more than token financial contributions, while the defunct condition of the Catholic League precluded any help from that direction. The attitude of Maximilian of Bavaria, the leading secular Catholic prince in

Germany and one of the few princes of the day with ready cash rather than debts, is indicative. After the death of Matthias the hard-pressed Ferdinand approached Maximilian seeking a loan, but he grudgingly agreed to advance only half of the amount requested, which was moreover to be secured by giving him possession of the fortress of Kufstein, on the border between Bavaria and Austria. This was a valuable potential acquisition for Maximilian in the event of non-repayment of the loan, which was all too likely in view of the extent of Imperial debts, so that Ferdinand declined the offer.¹

On the Bohemian side, the support received from the duke of Savoy and the Palatinate through Mansfeld's army, and from the alliance with Bethlen Gabor, were sufficient to save them from early defeat, but not enough to secure victory before Ferdinand finally mustered a coalition against them. When they set up their directorate they expected widespread support from their co-religionists, not only from the other lands of the Bohemian crown, together with Austria and Hungary, but also from the Protestant Union in the Empire, the United Provinces, England, Sweden and Denmark, as well perhaps as from Catholic but anti-Habsburg France. In the following two years most of these hopes proved illusory.

The contribution from the other Habsburg lands was confined mainly to the modest contingent from Silesia, together with Moravia's slightly larger forces after Thurn had enforced their participation. Upper and Lower Austria only began to recruit in earnest after the formation of the Bohemian Confederation in mid-1619, so that their participation was too little and too late, while practical support from the Dutch in the form of money and a few troops was likewise limited in extent. Mansfeld's army arrived at a vital moment, but it was not large, and moreover Mansfeld was notoriously inclined to pursue his own strategy, usually one of limiting his risk, rather than following the orders of his employers. A little help also came in the form of small regiments raised by minor co-religionist sympathisers, most of which joined Mansfeld's army campaigning in western Bohemia.²

Bethlen Gabor was the Bohemians' most important ally, bringing in a substantial army and engaging in joint operations against the common enemy, but even here there was good reason to worry about his reliability, while his Ottoman links were a definite political disadvantage in the search for other support. His forces, although often large, were mainly light cavalry, irregulars who reported for service only after bringing in the harvest, so that he rarely appeared in the field before late summer and his men were ready to go home by the onset of winter. At other

times he had far fewer troops at his disposal, and he was dependent on his allies for infantry and artillery support, as well as for the pay for his men, to the extent that they could not provide for themselves through booty.

Elsewhere religious sympathies did not extend to physical assistance, not least because the conflict in Bohemia came out of the blue to most of the prospective allies. Insofar as Europe had been expecting a war, this was not it, and for most it necessitated a new political appraisal of the situation. Speculation had centred around a war on Germany's western frontiers, probably developing from a renewal of hostilities between the Spanish and the Dutch in the Netherlands after the end of the truce in 1621, and almost certainly involving France in an alliance against the Habsburgs. This concept was essentially the war which almost happened in 1610 around Cleves-Jülich, but which in the event was limited to a single brief siege. The outbreak of war in Bohemia was thus three years too early and moreover in the wrong place, not in the Rhineland, where French, Spanish and Dutch territories were in close proximity to each other, but far away to the east, where none of those powers, nor any of the other potential allies for the Bohemians, had direct strategic interests. The days were passing, if not already past, when princes were inclined to go to war for mainly religious reasons, although many could still manage to reconcile their religious convictions to their political objectives. At first sight few Protestant powers could see any such wider reasons for involvement in Bohemia, so they limited themselves to sympathetic noises and talk of mediation.

Some of their princes also had more pressing concerns. Gustavus II Adolphus of Sweden had just concluded a short war with Russia over border areas and was looking for an opportunity to renew his raids on Polish territory. His military activity in turn occupied the attention of Christian IV of Denmark, always on his guard against his Nordic neighbour as a first priority. Meanwhile James I of England was still pursuing his long-standing objective of arranging a Spanish marriage for his son Charles, which precluded him from supporting a Protestant rebellion against the Habsburgs in Bohemia. James refused even to make a loan, although his anti-Spanish subjects contributed enough in a public subscription to finance a regiment of 2500 men, which reached Bohemia in August 1620.³

France had even better reasons for not wishing to become involved, having recently passed through a period of internal turmoil which included two rebellions, noble-led and with Huguenot support, following which the teenage Louis XIII finally seized power from his mother's

regency. Still only seventeen in 1618, Louis had no wish to intervene in a religious quarrel abroad which could only too easily contribute to a renewal of religious conflict at home, and so he too offered mediation rather than help. France and others were also wary of involvement in what could be seen as an internal Habsburg matter, but which, if outsiders rushed in, could possibly escalate into a much more widespread war. This was an eventuality few wanted and none were prepared for, while European princes were always reluctant to appear to be supporting revolt, wherever it might occur.

One such opponent of revolt was Elector Johann Georg I of Saxony, the conservative, constitutionalist Lutheran who ruled the only major Protestant territory apart from the Upper Palatinate which bordered on Bohemia. Nevertheless the Bohemians had initially hoped for support from that direction, and as previously noted one party led by Schlick actively promoted the elector as a candidate for the Bohemian crown, although without any encouragement from him. Saxony had in the past been an active supporter of Lutherans in the Habsburg lands, and emissaries and messages of support sent by the then elector Christian II during the confrontation with Emperor Rudolf II which eventually led to the Letter of Majesty had played a significant part in securing the final concessions. Thereafter Christian had provided further help for the many German-speaking Lutheran émigrés who had settled in Bohemia, especially Prague, for whom two churches were built with financial support from the Saxon treasury, and he also despatched pastors from his own court to serve in them.⁴ Hence there was some sympathy for the Bohemian revolt at the outset in Saxony, as it had originated from infringements of the Protestant rights established with Saxon help in 1609. Here too, however, sympathy did not extend to financial or military support, and Johann Georg confined himself to mediation, seeking to arrange a cease-fire in December 1618, but this was refused by the Bohemians.⁵

One of the factors limiting Saxon support was the extent to which members of the Bohemian Brethren, notable among them Ruppá and Budowetz, quickly became the leading influences in the directorate. This was seen in Dresden as bringing the revolt under the control of Calvinists, a confession to which the Saxon court had long been bitterly opposed. In 1602 the court preacher had published an anti-Calvinist tract in which he argued that 'the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics are more closely related to each other in religion than to the Calvinists', going on to detail sixteen 'heresies' which separated the Calvinists from the Lutherans. His successor at the time of the Bohemian revolt, Hoë

von Hoënegg, a well-known polemicist who had previously served in Prague, likewise preferred the Catholics to the Calvinists, attacking the latter in furious sermons which met with the approval of Johann Georg and his councillors.⁶ The election of the Calvinist Friedrich as king of Bohemia thus distanced Saxony further from the revolt, while the subsequent Calvinist 'cleansing' of the Prague churches was badly received not only there but in other Lutheran territories in Germany. Johann Georg's growing hostility to the revolt and his eventual participation in its suppression have frequently been criticised on the grounds that he should have supported his co-religionists rather than their opponents, but this argument erroneously regards the Protestants of the time as a monolithic block, like the Catholics, rather than being comprised of two or more distinct and often mutually hostile confessions. The point is well made by a decree issued in Württemberg in 1617, which 'lumped Calvinists and Zwinglians along with Jesuits, the pope, tyrants, and Turks as common threats to the faith'.⁷

There were also political considerations. A close association with the emperor and the house of Austria was a long-standing fundamental of Saxon external policy, and Johann Georg in particular took a firmly constitutionalist position in respect of the Empire. Significant parts of Saxon territory were also fiefs of the Bohemian crown, adding a strong political reason for standing aloof from the revolt to the elector's personal view that he was in duty bound to the lawful king and emperor.⁸ As the Bohemians went on first to depose Ferdinand as their king and then to elect a replacement, Johann Georg and his councillors increasingly came to view the revolt not as a religious issue but as a rebellion against the established order. Moreover Saxony and the Palatinate had long been polar opposites in their attitudes to the major issues in the Empire, so that Friedrich's election added political as well as religious obstacles to Saxon support for the Bohemians.

Germany – Union and League

The Protestant Union

As the members of the Protestant Union assembled in Heilbronn in early May 1618 it was very much business as usual in the Empire, with no sense of immediate crisis, and indeed although the political arguments were continuing the general state of Germany was calmer than it had been for decades. The main issues of the day were Khlesl's efforts to find a *Komposition* in the Empire and the question of the prospective succession to Matthias as emperor. Predictably the Union members, led by

the Calvinist group around the Palatinate, linked both these subjects to their long-standing demands for security of possession of secularised former Catholic church properties, together with the closely linked issues of majority voting in the Reichstag and the status of the Imperial courts. Their resulting declaration was essentially a restatement of the demands they made at the Reichstag of 1615, progress upon which was to be a precondition of any *Komposition*, and pending which they would seek to block discussion of the Imperial succession. The force of this threat was, however, considerably diminished by the weakened state of the Union at the time. A year earlier a proposal to extend its life by ten years had been defeated, mainly by the cities, and a mere three years agreed in its place, and moreover Brandenburg and Neuburg had ceased to participate, while the search for new members, particularly in northern Germany, had been completely unsuccessful. The cities, the Union's principal paymasters, had also placed an effective limit on the ambitions of the more militant princely members, stressing that the Union's constitution confined it strictly to the defence of its members' territories in the event of attack.

The outbreak of the revolt in Prague a few weeks later produced no immediate response from the Union, and nor did the Bohemian directorate's urgent application for membership, which they made in June. Instead the Union did not meet again until October, and when they assembled in Rothenburg it was quickly evident that most of the members had no intention of becoming involved in the revolt. They went so far as to agree that the situation in Bohemia should be regarded as of wider concern due to its bearing on religion and freedom, but they limited practical assistance to permitting the recruitment of soldiers by the Bohemians in their territories, while denying the same opportunity to their opponents. They also decided to refuse passage through their territories for troops intended for use against the Bohemians, with Spanish forces from the Netherlands clearly in mind, but this was no more than a gesture, given the availability of other routes through Germany. The militants, notably Christian of Anhalt and the margrave of Ansbach, were not satisfied with this restrained approach, but they were very much in the minority.⁹

Thereafter the Union did little or nothing beyond looking on for a further eight months, while the fortunes of war in Bohemia went first one way and then the other, and when it did meet again it was not the situation of the Bohemians but the death of Matthias in March 1619 which was the proximate cause. Nevertheless the members were not blind to the signs of potential escalation in the conflict. Although major Spanish

forces had not at that stage been directly involved, many soldiers had been recruited in the Netherlands for the emperor's army, which was led by former Spanish officers, and more active intervention by Spain was a very evident possibility. Maximilian of Bavaria had been recruiting troops since December 1618, ostensibly for his own self-defence, the Catholic League was showing signs of resurrecting itself, and even the pope had become slightly more open-handed with financial support. More immediately, however, the issue of the Imperial succession had to be addressed, and so the Union met again in Heilbronn in June 1619.

The old demands were rehearsed once more, but with a new emphasis as a *Komposition* had become much less likely since Khlesl's deposition. Instead, with Ferdinand in control of Imperial policy, it was feared that there might be a counter-attack rather than concessions from the Catholic side, and political and legal action on former church properties might even be backed with military force if an army were to become available after suppression of the revolt in Bohemia. A clear element of self-interest thus underlay the discussions, particularly for the Lutheran princes who had substantial secularised land-holdings at stake.

In these uncertain circumstances the Union members had a new and direct interest in the survival of the Bohemian revolt, rather than it being solely a question of religious solidarity. Their first step was to agree a joint guarantee for a substantial loan to the Bohemians, the cash for which was then advanced by the city of Nuremberg. Their second was to decide to raise an army of their own, 8000 infantry and 3000 cavalry. Although the usual militants led by Christian of Anhalt saw in this the potential for more direct involvement the majority remained as cautious as ever, viewing the force as solely for self-defence. In fact it was essentially a deterrent, both to any possible threat to the Union members themselves, and also to outside intervention against the Bohemians, whether by Bavaria, by the Catholic League, or by Spanish forces attempting to pass through Germany from the Netherlands. The proposed army was large enough for this purpose but probably too small for effective independent campaigning, and that it was not intended for any proactive use, or indeed to fight at all, is indicated by the carefully modest financial provision which the Union made. After a period of peace it had adequate funds, principally in the form of outstanding normal contributions, to finance an army of this size for up to ten months, so they were able to proceed without calling for additional payments from the membership. In the event there was a 30 per cent shortfall in collecting the cash due, so that the funds were sufficient only for one campaigning season, effectively little more than the rest of 1619.¹⁰

Although the Union members had also hoped to use the Bohemian revolt as a reason for postponing the Imperial election, perhaps paving the way for a subsequent displacement of the Habsburgs or even opening up the possibility of a Protestant emperor, they were unsuccessful in this, and Ferdinand was elected two months after their meeting. The election of Friedrich V of the Palatinate as king of Bohemia in the same week posed a new problem for the Union, and the members met again in Rothenburg in mid-September specifically to consider whether he should be advised to accept the election or not. The risk was obvious. Were he to accept he would become king of a territory already at war with the Habsburg emperor, and his own Palatinate would inevitably be involved. The logical response to prevent its resources being deployed in Bohemia would be a Spanish Habsburg assault on the Palatinate itself from the Netherlands, a circumstance which would activate the Union's obligation to come to the defence of an attacked member, hence drawing it into the war. Predictably there was a split of opinions, but it made little difference as Friedrich made up his mind to accept in any case.

More significant was a decision to call yet another meeting, and this time to invite not only Union members but representatives of Protestant territories throughout Germany in an effort to form a wider united front. The significance lay, however, not in any positive results, but in the weakness, divisions and indecisiveness which it demonstrated. When they gathered in Nuremberg in mid-November 1619 the Union members were joined by representatives of only seven other principalities, all small apart from Brandenburg, and even these had only watching briefs with no powers to make commitments on behalf of their princes.¹¹

The Union members themselves were confronted with one of the classic military problems of the age, the difficulty of maintaining a significant-sized army without active employment. This was not only a question of expense but also of logistics. The number of human mouths to feed – not to mention the horses – was usually roughly double the number of enlisted men, the balance being made up of wives, children, servants, soldiers' boys, carters, sutlers and hangers-on of many kinds. Even in summer such numbers quickly exhausted the resources of any one area, and unless the army was kept on the move feeding it properly soon became impracticable, while with the approach of winter the situation worsened rapidly unless the troops could be dispersed into suitable quarters. Thus it had long been recognised that recruiting an army, even if initially for purely defensive reasons, frequently led to pressure to actually deploy it, or at the least to attempt to occupy winter quarters in a prospective enemy's territory.

There was also the financial problem. The Union's initial reserve of contributions was being rapidly used up and a new levy would soon be required, but the cities were unwilling to pay more while many of the princes were already substantially in arrears. On the other hand the situation appeared no less threatening than it had at Heilbronn five months before, so that it might be necessary to maintain a contingency or deterrent army for an indefinite period. In these circumstances a division of opinion rapidly emerged between the more impetuous princes, who advocated actually using the army in one way or another, and the more cautious members, mainly but not exclusively the cities, who viewed it as less risky and also cheaper to remain on the defensive for the time being.

There were also differing views among the activists. Christian of Anhalt had been appointed as general by the Bohemian Estates a month before Friedrich actually accepted the crown, and he was now in command of all the Palatine and Bohemian forces, so that he naturally wanted the Union army to join them in the war against Ferdinand.¹² This was at least a realistic proposition, as although the Union force was relatively small it was still large enough to play a valuable and possibly even decisive role in Bohemia. The proposal was, however, completely contrary to all the basic provisions of the Union constitution, and it also carried the clear risk of involving the Union in a long-drawn-out and escalating conflict. Others suggested using the army for some form of pre-emptive strike against the Catholic party in Germany, an idea which was as ill-considered as it was ill-defined. This too would have been in contravention of the strictly defensive limitation, as well as raising fears of another princely debacle similar to the Strasbourg incursion at the time of the Cleves-Jülich crisis. Only slightly less aggressively, the margrave of Baden-Durlach suggested marching the army into the territories of the ecclesiastical electors to find its winter quarters.¹³

There was, however, one other way to use the army without further major expense or risk, and that was as implicit backing for a bold line in negotiations. The principal concern, particularly of the princely members, remained not the situation of the Bohemian Protestants, nor even religion as such, but the old search for security in their possession of secularised church properties. Hence it was agreed to present the long-standing demands once again to the emperor, but more particularly to Maximilian of Bavaria, as the head of the re-formed Catholic League, with the stipulation that the latter should respond within two months giving categorical assurances on behalf of the Catholic estates that they would accede to them. Failing a reply, or if the reply were unsatisfactory,

the Union would take the necessary further steps.¹⁴ This imprecise threat then conveniently enabled the members to defer the question of what to do about the army, leaving it to the military leadership under the command of the margrave of Ansbach to make further proposals in the light of the situation when the response was received.

The principal point to emerge from this meeting is the small size of the party among the German Protestants willing to contemplate military intervention, essentially confined to the Palatinate and a few of its traditional allies, mostly fellow Calvinists. As noted in Chapter 2, the members of the Union were a minority among the Protestant estates as a whole even before the withdrawal of Brandenburg and Neuburg, and the very limited response to the invitation to non-members to attend shows that there was no wider wish to become involved in a confrontation. The members themselves were divided, with the activists ultimately a minority even in the Union, and while the Palatinate was certainly fully committed it seems questionable how far the others were in earnest. Militant talk was cheap when it was clear from the outset that it would not carry the day against the opposition of the cities and the more moderate princes. In the end the best Christian of Anhalt could achieve from the meeting was a formal reconfirmation of the Union's commitment to defend the Palatinate's own territory against attack.

The Catholic League

Meanwhile efforts to resurrect the Catholic League had begun to make progress. The problems leading to its decline were also described in Chapter 2, and it had been dormant since 1613, before effectively ceasing to exist in 1615 when Maximilian of Bavaria had resigned as director even of his own southern division. Instead in 1617 he had formed a small local defence group, comprising only Bavaria and a few neighbouring ecclesiastical territories, but as the emperor had forbidden such associations in that same year this had remained secret.

Although Maximilian was strongly opposed to the 'heretical' Bohemian revolt from the outset he was not inclined to make any early move either to assist the emperor directly or to revive the League in the Empire, as the problems he had experienced before still rankled. A major source of friction had been the participation of Habsburg territories and the resulting claim for a share in the leadership made by Emperor Matthias's brother, Archduke Maximilian, giving rise to a personal animosity between the two Maximilians. This had been further aggravated more recently by competition between the same two to acquire the small territory of Mindelheim, one of many examples of the

long-standing rivalry between the Bavarian dukes and their Habsburg neighbours. In this case the Bavarian had won, but he blamed the archduke for the considerably increased cost.

When the archduke died in November 1618 Ferdinand saw the opportunity, and he commissioned his brother Leopold to visit Maximilian in Munich to argue for a renewal of the League. At around the same time both Philip III of Spain and the pope wrote to Maximilian in similar vein, while he himself suggested to his brother, the archbishop-elect of Cologne, that the latter might take the lead in re-constituting the former Rhine division of the League. Nevertheless he made no direct move himself, instead drawing attention to the past problems, particularly over the non-payment of contributions, which would have to be overcome first.¹⁵

Thus it was the elector of Mainz who, after considerable hesitation, took the initiative, calling a meeting of the three ecclesiastical electors and the bishops of important neighbouring territories around the Rhine in January 1619, with the intention of renewing the Catholic League. Still Maximilian remained aloof, although clearly disconcerted that matters were proceeding without him, but nevertheless the electors pressed on, quickly agreeing a new association on the original model, that is divided into two directorates rather than the later three. As before the Rhine region was to be under Mainz leadership, and it was hoped that Maximilian would again become head of the counterpart for southern Germany, but even so the agreement pointedly provided that the two directorates would have independent military commands, with Maximilian only taking overall control in the event of joint operations.¹⁶

Maximilian still had reservations, and among various points first requiring resolution the most critical for him was to establish firmly that there was no question of a third directorate under Habsburg leadership. To the consternation of the other participants Archduke Leopold, who had become older but no wiser since his part in the Passau army march on Prague in 1611, responded sharply that on the contrary his family were indeed looking for such a directorate, and that he was himself to head it. The resulting impasse was only resolved at the end of April, when Ferdinand intervened personally shortly after the death of Emperor Matthias, writing to confirm the final withdrawal of the Habsburg claim.¹⁷

Even then matters proceeded slowly while the constitution was redrafted and the relationship between the two directorates was debated. Nor did all the former members hasten to rejoin, so that active

canvassing was necessary, while the archbishop of Salzburg remained as evasive as before, keeping his substantial and strategically important territory on the sidelines and sending observers rather than representatives to meetings. Thus it was not until August 1619 that Maximilian's southern directorate held its first meeting, while the League was not fully reconstituted until a joint meeting of the two directorates in December of that year, and even then it was more of a federation than a single entity.

Throughout the discussions all concerned emphasised the defensive nature of the association, and the relevant article in the constitution stressed that any particular problem would only become a matter for the League after all other possible means of resolution had been exhausted. The purpose of the League arming itself was not offensive, but so that 'the one sword should constrain the other to stay in the scabbard'.¹⁸ This was the League's position in relation to the Protestant Union, and its initial recruitment of troops was intended as a counterbalance to the latter's army, opposing one deterrent force to the other. Nevertheless the revolt in Bohemia was seen as a general threat by Maximilian and the other members, so that the defensive concept was extended to include the possibility of intervention on the side of the emperor should the Union enter the conflict to assist the Bohemians.

The key point about the developments in Germany during 1619 is that, apart from a small group of mainly Calvinist hotheads, neither the Protestants nor the Catholics were contemplating an attack on their religious opponents, but each side was afraid that the unstable situation created by the Bohemian revolt might encourage offensive action by the other. Thus, in a kind of seventeenth-century Cold War, both the Union and the League began recruiting armies which were intended principally as deterrents, further adding to the increasing instability. Both sides could also see potentially greater dangers should their opponents win a clear victory in Bohemia. For the Protestants this raised the spectre of the militant Ferdinand, the arch-protagonist of counter-Reformation, with a successful army at his disposal and the temptation to use it to settle with the Protestants once and for all by seizing and forcibly restoring the secularised church properties. This is exactly what Ferdinand actually did ten years later, using the armies which had recently defeated Christian IV of Denmark in a later phase of the Thirty Years War. The Catholics in their turn were haunted by another twentieth-century concept, the domino theory, whereby if Bohemia were lost the other Habsburg provinces with largely Protestant populations would follow one by one, and the penetration of 'heresy' into even

their own still solidly Catholic domains might ensue, together with the political challenges and demands which usually accompanied it.

Maximilian of Bavaria

By the autumn of 1619 Ferdinand's military situation was critical. True, he had been elected emperor at the end of August, but in the same month Bethlen Gabor had taken the field again, launching a new attack through Hungary directed towards Vienna. A year after Ferdinand had set out to crush the Bohemian revolt his army was instead hastily retreating to defend his own capital, with Thurn in hot pursuit and about to join up with Bethlen to besiege the city for the second time. Spanish support had been limited, and despite the urgings of Archduke Albrecht from the Netherlands the Spanish court in Madrid were still reluctant to do more. Maximilian of Bavaria seemed to be Ferdinand's only hope of substantial military support, so after his coronation in Frankfurt he made his way directly to Munich.

Maximilian was a much more significant character than Ferdinand, strong willed, more thoughtful and further sighted, but although not without social graces he was more reserved and did not share the Habsburg's winning affability. Slim and of medium height, Maximilian's most noted physical feature was his high-pitched feminine-sounding voice, while his most evident personal trait was his extreme piety, which seems to have been as much innate as instilled by his Jesuit education. His confessor recorded that his daily routine included an hour of private prayer on rising, followed by two or sometimes three Masses in the morning and well over an hour of Vespers in the afternoon, together with a careful examination of his own conscience before retiring to bed. Nevertheless, concluded the Jesuit, Maximilian's religion was ultimately personal and private, a point confirmed when after his death a box which he always had at hand, but the contents of which he had never revealed, was found to contain a hair shirt and well-used instruments for self-flagellation.¹⁹ Maximilian was a determined opponent of 'heresy', but nevertheless not a fanatic, and where political considerations arose he had a notably more pragmatic approach than Ferdinand, exhibiting none of the recklessness with which the latter sought to implement what seemed to him to be God's commands. Both were admirers of the Jesuits, but although Maximilian respected the advice of his spiritual guide the latter never exercised comparable influence to Ferdinand's confessor or the court preachers of many Protestant princes.

Maximilian became duke of Bavaria at the age of 24, when his father abdicated and entrusted the heavily indebted duchy to his care, but by 1619, twenty years later, he had not only restored its finances but built up a reserve of cash few princes of the time could match, reportedly saying that in time of war the best fortresses were full coffers.²⁰ He was a man of ability and application, speaking Italian, French and Latin fluently, as well as learning Spanish late in life, and his working habits were as disciplined as his religious observances. He usually started work at four in the morning, often continuing until late at night, took exercise only occasionally, and frowned upon the excesses of pleasure, eating and particularly drinking which were the norm in most princely courts of the time. He maintained an almost absolutist rule in Bavaria, summoning the Estates only twice during his long reign, but he was wise enough to listen to and to take advice, although avoiding dependence on any one councillor and reserving the final decisions to himself.²¹ In government he was careful and wary, always watchful for the interests of his own duchy, but his most pronounced political characteristic was an excessive caution which led him to be indecisive and unwilling to commit himself on important matters in case of possible consequences. Johann Georg of Saxony described him as 'very timid', while another contemporary noted of him during the war that were a single cavalryman to appear outside Ingolstadt he would fear the city to be lost. He was also mistrustful, even of his closest advisers, as well as being inclined to see conspiracies and to suspect the motives of the princes and other parties with whom he had to deal on affairs of state.²²

There was a long tradition of rivalry between the houses of Habsburg and Wittelsbach, to which both Maximilian and Friedrich of the Palatinate belonged, going back over three hundred years. During this period Bavaria's leading position in the south of the Empire had been steadily eroded by growing Habsburg power, as the latter family had both extended its possessions and consolidated its hold on the Imperial crown. The relationship had been aggravated by boundary disputes concerning their adjoining territories, most recently over the acquisition of Mindelheim mentioned above, and although Maximilian maintained a formal correctness in his dealings with Austria and the emperor he also watched carefully for opportunities to further his territorial and political ambitions on behalf of his dynasty. Nevertheless the families had frequently inter-married, and Ferdinand and Maximilian were both grandsons of Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria, added to which Ferdinand's wife was Maximilian's sister, so that they were not only cousins but also brothers-in-law. In 1619 Ferdinand was 41, and although Maximilian

was five years older they had overlapped during their time at the Jesuit university of Ingolstadt, so that they knew each other well, although not to the extent of personal friendship.

Maximilian's initial reaction to the Bohemian rebellion had been that although he was very much aware of its wider general significance he did not want to be drawn into the conflict, and like other princes of the Empire he was not prepared to respond to the repeated pleas of Emperor Matthias for military or financial help. The most he would do was to accede to an Imperial request for a prohibition on recruiting for the Bohemians in Bavaria, as well as refusing passage through his duchy to troops intended for supporting the Bohemians but allowing it for Spanish forces.²³ It was already clear from this and from Maximilian's circumspect approach to renewing the League that he would not be easily persuaded to hasten to Ferdinand's assistance, and that he was unlikely to take either political or financial risks on the latter's behalf without adequate security and good prospects of advantage for himself. Ferdinand had already had exploratory talks with the three ecclesiastical electors before leaving Frankfurt, where it was agreed in principle to raise a League army which would both protect the League members' territories and support the emperor, but he knew that Maximilian was the key figure, and his situation was such that in the end he had little choice but to accept what one historian has described as 'a Bavarian *Diktat* to the desperate emperor'.²⁴ The negotiations were carried out not by Ferdinand and Maximilian in person, but by two leading councillors of each, together with a corresponding representative of the ecclesiastical electors, while the Spanish ambassador Oñate was also present at Maximilian's invitation. They took only a week to reach an agreement, the Munich compact of 8 October 1619.²⁵

Under this contract Maximilian agreed to take full control of the League forces and to assist the emperor, but with the proviso that as future circumstances were as yet uncertain 'he committed himself to nothing specific, other than that he would not omit to do anything which was in his power to do', the definition of which was left entirely up to him. No member of the house of Habsburg would seek to interfere in the conduct of the League, and Maximilian was recognised both by Ferdinand and by the ecclesiastical electors as sole head for operational purposes. The agreement gave him almost total discretion in deciding upon action, which he was not obliged to take until he was fully satisfied with both the provision of finance and the state of readiness of the forces, however pressing the emperor's military situation might be. It was also provided that there were to be no negotiations or treaties

with prospective opponents without Maximilian's personal approval, although he in turn conceded the same right to Ferdinand.

Most significant were the guarantees provided to Maximilian personally in respect of the costs and risks of the war, which were to be borne entirely by the emperor. The latter was required to pledge his entire possessions for the purpose, a commitment which was also to devolve upon his successors if necessary, and in addition to reimbursement of any direct military costs in excess of Bavaria's basic contributions to the League this was also to cover other expenses, such as damage caused in the duchy by enemy troops. Moreover should Bavaria actually lose any territory as a result of the war it was to be compensated by transfer of an equal amount from the Austrian lands, while conversely if Maximilian re-conquered any Habsburg lands occupied by the enemy he was entitled to hold these with all rights of possession, subject only to a few exceptions, until such time as his expenses had been paid in full. Given the permanently parlous state of Imperial finances and the inevitably high costs of the war, it was going to be extremely difficult for the emperor to meet these commitments even in the event of success. Thus Maximilian could see the prospect of permanent territorial gain in lieu of a cash repayment, whether by transfer of some Austrian lands or, more controversially, of the Palatinate territories belonging to Friedrich, the recently elected king of Bohemia, following his prospective defeat. The latter were carefully not mentioned in the contract although Maximilian extracted a verbal commitment, but when Ferdinand was later obliged to give Johann Georg of Saxony a written promise of an unnamed territory as a reward for his assistance Maximilian too demanded a written confirmation, which he received in May 1620.²⁶

Maximilian had another aspiration which was so secret that it did not feature in the contract at all, discussion of which was probably confined to the two principals. In medieval times the Palatine and Bavarian branches of the house of Wittelsbach had shared a single electoral position in the Empire, with the title of elector alternating between them, as confirmed in a family compact made in 1329. The Golden Bull of 1356, however, had merely allocated the electorate to the Palatinate, since which time that branch had not honoured the agreement, much to the chagrin of the Bavarians, and Maximilian now saw a chance to rectify the position and to enhance his own status. Thus he induced Ferdinand to promise to transfer Friedrich's electoral title to him upon successful conclusion of the war in Bohemia. Although there was a precedent, Charles V's transfer of the Saxony electorate after the Schmalkaldic war,

it was very doubtful whether such a proposal was either legal or within the powers of the emperor, but Ferdinand had little choice but to agree. To give effect to it would cause a *furor* in the Empire, but that was a problem to be faced later if keeping the promise could not somehow be avoided.

Once Maximilian's stipulations had been accepted it only remained for the provisions of this Munich compact to be confirmed at the first joint meeting of the reconstituted League, held at Würzburg in December 1619, and for larger-scale recruiting to be put in hand, with an agreed target of an army of 21,000 infantry and 4000 cavalry.²⁷ Potentially decisive help for Ferdinand in 1620 was on the way, but there was still much diplomatic work to be done to secure the necessary wider support and finance.

The cautious Maximilian had imposed one further condition. An advance against the Bohemians would have to be accompanied by a diversionary attack from the Spanish Netherlands on the principal Rhineland section of the Palatinate, thus pinning down its and the Protestant Union's forces there and preventing any possible retaliatory attack on League territories in Germany. Furthermore 1000 Spanish cavalry should be provided to serve with the League army itself. This was the purpose of Oñate's presence in Munich, and he, in agreement with Archduke Albrecht, gave the necessary assurances, although at that point without the authority of the government in Madrid, whose consent was as yet by no means certain.²⁸

Bethlen Gabor

Meanwhile the Bohemians had to contend with a major worry about their principal military ally, Bethlen Gabor, who by early 1620 was playing a double game. He had already startled them during the previous summer by the extent of his ambitions, floating the idea of seizing most of the Austrian lands and adding them to his own in the course of their joint campaign, but his real target was Habsburg Hungary. Thus although his withdrawal in November 1619 had ended the second siege of Vienna, this was a greater loss for the Bohemians than for him, as his more important objective had been the capture of Pressburg, which he continued to hold. He then entered into parallel negotiations with the Bohemians on the one hand and with the emperor on the other, aiming to extract the maximum advantage for himself in respect of title and territorial possessions, either by forcing concessions from Ferdinand or by fighting against him. His opening demand was that in return for

a peace agreement Habsburg Hungary should be ceded to him for life, to reinforce which he persuaded the Hungarian Estates to elect him as their prince on 8 January 1620. In the end he had to settle for smaller concessions from Ferdinand, although these were still humiliating for the latter, but in return he then offered not a peace but a nine-month truce, concluded on 16 January.²⁹

Within days Bethlen nevertheless made an alliance with Friedrich and the Bohemians, and in the following months their representatives developed a plan for a further joint attack on Vienna in the autumn, which would have been essentially a repeat of the 1619 campaign but in greater strength. His justification for this duplicity was that a condition of his truce with the emperor had been that the Bohemians could also accede to it, but by early 1620 Ferdinand was intent on crushing the revolt with the assistance of the League, rather than coming to terms, and as no truce was forthcoming Bethlen claimed to be free of his own obligations. By April he was again providing troops to assist the Bohemians, although a few thousand rather than an army, and while events overtook the planned further attack on Vienna a reported 5000 of Bethlen's light cavalry did fight at the Bohemians' last stand at the White Mountain in November 1620. Meanwhile, strengthened by Ferdinand's concessions, Bethlen convened a further Hungarian Estates meeting at Neusohl in August, where he was elected as king. Unlike Friedrich, however, he prudently refrained from having himself crowned, instead adopting the title of king-elect of Hungary, and thus keeping his options open for whatever the future might bring.³⁰

The machinations with Bethlen also prompted the Bohemians to go one step further in the search for allies, and in April 1620 they sent an embassy to the Ottoman Porte. Such dealing with the perceived arch-enemy of Christendom was controversial at the time, both internally and more widely, as well as attracting great attention from the Habsburg investigators at the subsequent trials of the Bohemian directors, but although promises were plentiful it produced nothing of practical assistance to the revolt.

Saxony

As well as requiring support by means of an attack on the Palatinate from the Spanish Netherlands, Maximilian was anxious to ensure at least the neutrality of Saxony before starting out on campaign. For Ferdinand there were also important political considerations, as if he could secure backing from some of the more conservative elements

among the Protestant princes of the Empire a campaign against the Bohemians could be presented as a legal Imperial enforcement action against rebels, rather than as Catholic suppression of a Protestant-led secession. In this the key figure was the elector of Saxony, who, it was hoped, could be persuaded not only to participate on his own account, but also to rally significant support from the Upper and Lower Saxon Circles. As has been noted, Johann Georg was not only strongly inclined towards legitimacy in the Empire, but also increasingly hostile to the Bohemian revolt as a result of its Calvinist and Palatine leadership. An Imperial diplomat reported at this time that the court preacher, in his writings and sermons, 'paints the Calvinists and rebellious Bohemians very black', while the Dresden court itself was firmly of the opinion that the revolt had nothing to do with religion, but was a purely political matter.³¹ Thus the elector might well have remained neutral, but to prevail upon him to do more required some positive inducement.

With the ink scarcely dry on the Munich compact an envoy from Ferdinand appeared in Dresden to suggest to the elector that were he to provide assistance against the Bohemians the emperor would in turn be ready to agree to an extension of Saxony's territory, and a further embassy in February 1620 made specific the offer of 'recompense' for his participation. Johann Georg was quick to follow this up, and at the beginning of March his own emissary informed Ferdinand that should he join in the action he would require full repayment of his expenses, which were to be guaranteed by the pledging to him of Upper and Lower Lusatia. Over and above this he was looking to acquire a suitable principality, which its present owner would forfeit as a consequence of his support for the Bohemians, a thinly disguised reference to Christian of Anhalt. Ferdinand's reply, accepting these conditions but maintaining equal discretion about the identity of the territory in mind, reached the elector soon afterwards, and the deal was done.

The question of secularised church properties which had prompted the Union ultimatum to Maximilian and the Catholic estates in November 1619 was also central for the north-German Protestant princes, including the elector of Saxony, as there were many such properties in their territories. They feared that the Catholic side might use any outbreak of hostilities as an opportunity to seize by force what they had not been able to regain through the courts, so that guarantees were essential if any of them were to be persuaded to join in the action against the Bohemians. Even the ecclesiastical electors realised this, tempering their response when the ultimatum was discussed at a Catholic

meeting in Würzburg in February, which was attended by both members and non-members of the League. Hence rather than rejecting the demands outright they agreed to make the minimum concessions essential to meet the needs of the moment, while being careful to find a form of words which would not prejudice their claims for restitution in the longer term.

The electors of Mainz and Cologne, together with Maximilian of Bavaria's representative, were accordingly deputed to meet the delegates of the Upper and Lower Saxon Circles, which they did in the small Thuringian town of Mühlhausen in mid-March. There they successfully limited their offer to guaranteeing that the Catholic side would neither forcibly repossess secularised properties, nor assist others to do so, other than in accordance with the due processes of the law. Even this was restricted to Lutheran holdings and excluded Calvinists, while no concession was made on the related demand that Protestant administrators of relevant bishoprics should be allowed to take the seats in Imperial institutions to which their previous Catholic heads had been entitled, the blocking of which had thus far ensured the continuation of built-in Catholic majorities. Nevertheless the undertaking was accepted on behalf of the Protestants by the elector of Saxony and Landgrave Ludwig of Hessen-Darmstadt in an agreement of 20 March 1620, to which the emperor added his signature a month later.³²

Another contentious topic was whether the Imperial ban could be applied to Friedrich of the Palatinate, as a rebel against the emperor. This was a necessary step for Ferdinand to take almost immediately, in that unless Friedrich were outlawed the proposed invasion of the Palatinate would be illegal, and as a breach of the Imperial peace it would render all concerned liable to penalties. Moreover it would also be important subsequently in order to provide grounds for seizing Friedrich's property and electoral title in order to pay off Maximilian, and without this precondition being met the latter might not move against Bohemia at all. There were, however, legal, practical and political problems.

Every emperor since Charles V had sworn on his accession not to apply the ban to any person, whether of high or low rank, without a hearing and due process of law, but such procedures were always slow, and summoning Friedrich to a court would delay military action for far too long. Like many aspects of Imperial law, though, there were exceptions and precedents, albeit these were often disputed. An ordinance of 1555 provided that in the case of an open and violent breach of the peace the emperor could order the perpetrator to desist, failing which the ban could be applied immediately, while another of 1559 had gone

further, dispensing with the need for a warning order in such circumstances. Whether these took precedence over the emperor's accession oath provided scope for endless debate among constitutional lawyers, but the political reality was that using a legally contentious procedure to pave the way for dispossessing a leading Protestant prince would inevitably alienate other Protestant princes, not least because of the precedent which it would create. Anxious not to reduce the chances of recruiting Protestant supporters, Ferdinand called for advice from the princes meeting at Mühlhausen, where they eventually opted for the middle way of 1555, that Friedrich should be ordered to quit Bohemia within a specified time, a conclusion which conveniently postponed the real decision. All concerned also skirted round the problem that it was a matter of legal dispute whether Bohemia was part of the Empire at all, and hence whether the revolt was an Imperial concern or only an internal Habsburg problem.³³

In the event no other Protestant prince was prepared to join Johann Georg in assisting the emperor militarily. At a meeting of the Upper Saxon Circle in Leipzig the best he could achieve, and that by a bare majority, was a decision to raise a small force for six months for the defence of the Circle itself, and moreover on condition of strict neutrality. Even that force did not materialise, as the more important principalities, including Brandenburg and Pomerania, voted against, and they subsequently refused to pay their shares of the prospective costs, while the Lower Saxon Circle would not go further than a commitment to neutrality. The elector's discomfort was increased by internal opposition to his policy within Saxony itself, so that he had to avoid putting it before the Estates, while Christian IV of Denmark wrote urging him not to enter an alliance with those whose ultimate objective was the destruction of the Protestant religion.³⁴ Johann Georg hesitated, but he was too far committed to withdraw with honour and the prospective rewards still attracted him, although in his final response mention of the transfer of the un-named principality had disappeared, probably out of consideration for Protestant susceptibilities. Hence he merely insisted that actually applying the Imperial ban to Friedrich must be postponed, while refusing to commence his own advance until Maximilian was well under way with a full-scale attack on Bohemia.³⁵ Consequently although Ferdinand issued an ultimatum to Friedrich, giving him until 1 June to withdraw or face the ban, for the time being he went no further, but in mid-May he nevertheless authorised Johann Georg to proceed against Silesia and Lusatia, and Maximilian to make a start by subjugating Upper Austria.³⁶

Difficulties and delays

By then the enterprise was already substantially overdue, and it would be a further two months before it actually commenced. Following their Munich agreement Ferdinand and Maximilian had contemplated launching the invasion in March 1620, but the professional soldiers doubtless soon told them that this was unrealistic.³⁷ Final mustering of a large army was not feasible until the weather allowed the men and their accompanying families to camp in the open, while a prudent commander preferred not to move until there was enough grass in the fields to provide some sustenance for the horses. Many other difficulties had to be overcome before this stage was reached, as Maximilian needed men and money, as well as support from Spain for the diversionary invasion of the Palatinate, and all proved problematic.

The Spanish had long recognised the necessity of providing some financial support to the emperor in response to the Bohemian revolt, starting in the summer of 1618, when their assistance was key to the raising of Bucquoy's army.³⁸ They had also sent some troops from the Netherlands and Italy to assist Ferdinand, but these were contingents to serve with the Imperial army rather than a major force in its own right, whereas Archduke Albrecht and Oñate argued strongly for more direct military intervention. This had given rise to a heated debate in Madrid about whether to send more men from Spanish Naples to Bohemia, and if so how many, and how to get them there.³⁹ There was strong opposition because of the desperate state of Spanish finances, but the deterioration of Ferdinand's military position in the summer of 1619 finally convinced the majority of the need to act, although some, including King Philip III's confessor, maintained their resistance. This latter group was similarly opposed to the planned attack on the Palatinate, so that prolonged lobbying by Archduke Albrecht's and Maximilian's representatives, as well as by Ferdinand's ambassador Khevenhüller, was necessary before agreement and funding could be secured. The news that Ferdinand himself was besieged in Vienna for the second time was the final catalyst, but even then the sum initially allocated in late December 1619 was much less than Albrecht considered necessary, and it took until the end of April 1620 before Philip authorised the full amount, as well as payment for the 1000 cavalry which Oñate had promised for the League army.⁴⁰

Securing financial support from the pope proved even more difficult. Matthias, with Spanish support, had appealed to him for help in July 1618, but although a small monthly payment was agreed this was soon

in arrears, as the pope expected the revolt to be quickly put down. In autumn 1619 Ferdinand despatched a councillor to Rome to ask for a much-increased subsidy, together with a large loan and a tax levy on the Italian clergy, but without success. He tried again in December, this time pointing out the danger to Vienna itself, in response to which the pope finally agreed to a doubling of his modest monthly contribution. Maximilian also sought financial support for the League army but met with an equally grudging response, causing him to write in frustration to Philip III that if the head of the church was asleep to the danger it was up to the Catholic princes to wake him up. As his ambassadors cooled their heels at the papal court at the beginning of 1620 the duke noted that 'all the signs are that Rome does not understand the situation, as they delude themselves that it will be an easy matter to wipe out the [Bohemian] confederates in the Empire'. Eventually the pope was persuaded to authorise a special tax on the German clergy, but not until July 1620, and even then the yield was limited, as the Germans proved reluctant to pay as well as disputing the pope's authority to impose the tax on them. Funds collected from a similar tax on the Italian clergy, as well as a direct contribution from the pope to the League, did not arrive until 1621, well after the defeat of the revolt at the battle of the White Mountain.⁴¹

In the newly reconstituted Catholic League itself Maximilian was soon confronted with the same money problems which had contributed to its former demise. Many ecclesiastical princes did not join immediately, and some not at all, among them previous members.⁴² Reluctance to pay their contributions was a principal reason, and many who did join proved equally unforthcoming in this respect. As recruiting progressed and the League army grew larger the financial situation became increasingly pressing, as the resources not only of the southern directorate of the League and the Bavarian Circle, but also of Maximilian's own treasury, neared exhaustion, while attempts to raise loans from international bankers met with either polite temporisation or outright refusal. By the first week of June 1620, with the army complete and encamped only some twenty miles from its Union opponents, the problem was so critical that Maximilian was forced to write to the elector of Cologne, the bishops of Bamberg and Würzburg, and other leading prelates, threatening to resign his position and to break off the military action, however damaging this might be for the common cause.⁴³

Finding men was intrinsically easier, as many of the Catholic princes, including Maximilian himself, had long been strengthening their own defence forces, so that there was a core upon which to build. These units

were, however, widely dispersed, while larger-scale new recruiting had to be undertaken mainly in more distant Catholic territories such as the Spanish Netherlands or northern Italy. This gave rise to two problems. Firstly, until the army could be concentrated the smaller local units were potentially vulnerable to Union attack, and secondly the forces recruited outside Germany had to find their way to the mustering point without being intercepted. In Munich in December 1619 Maximilian had boldly rebuffed the Union delegation's demands and implied threats, but he was nevertheless extremely anxious that as a result they might initiate military action before he himself was ready. He was particularly concerned that their first target might be the Franconian bishoprics, where troops recruited for the League by the elector of Cologne were quartered, and there were also concerns that they might move into the Habsburg possessions in Alsace and south-west Germany in order, in cooperation with the Protestant Swiss cantons, to block reinforcements for the Imperial and League armies coming from that direction. Hence Maximilian decided at the end of January to concentrate his available forces around Donauwörth, as a strategic point from which to respond to a possible Union first strike, from whichever direction, as well as to be ready to prevent any Protestant incursion over the Danube.⁴⁴

His anxieties were increased in mid-March, when Margrave Georg Friedrich of Baden-Durlach, a leading member of the Union, moved his forces into Habsburg territory around Freiburg and Breisach in order to install an artillery battery alongside the Rhine near the latter town, thereby effectively closing the river and a principal crossing point to Catholic troop movements. It was still there in early May, when Maximilian wrote to warn Ferdinand that he would only commence the campaign against Bohemia after his army had been strengthened by reinforcements which had been assembled in Lorraine and on the lower Rhine reaching him despite Protestant attempts to bar their way. In the event though, when on 8 June League and Imperial regiments moving east to join the Catholic armies reached Breisach and deployed in battle order, Baden's forces declined this overt challenge to attack them. Thus while an Imperial regiment remained at Breisach to hold Baden's men in check the remainder crossed and marched on to the League mustering point at Günzburg, near Ulm.⁴⁵

The political news was not encouraging for Maximilian, as in late May information arrived that the Bohemians had formed the new alliance with Bethlen Gabor mentioned above, and were also in negotiations with the Ottoman sultan for an anti-Habsburg pact. Meanwhile Archduke Albrecht was still delaying making a final commitment to the

diversionary attack on the Palatinate, ostensibly awaiting final authority from Madrid.⁴⁶ Although Albrecht was in favour of military support for the emperor he was also concerned that the proposed move could stretch his own resources as the end of the truce in the Netherlands approached, as well as perhaps giving the Dutch both the excuse and the opportunity to terminate it early by intervening themselves and launching an attack.⁴⁷ Whether for these reasons or simply because of legal concerns he also repeatedly pressed Ferdinand to apply the Imperial ban to Friedrich and to issue him, Albrecht, as military commander of the Burgundian circle of the Empire, with a mandate to enforce it, thus providing legitimate constitutional authority for an invasion of Palatine territory. This Ferdinand could not do because of the objection of the elector of Saxony, whose corresponding invasion of Lusatia and Silesia was equally central to the overall plan, so that doubts remained over Albrecht's eventual participation even as Maximilian moved towards a confrontation with the Union army. A stratagem was finally agreed whereby Ferdinand issued Albrecht with two copies of a declaration of the Imperial ban on Friedrich, signed by himself and the Imperial vice-chancellor but with day and month of the date left blank, so that in the event of absolute necessity Albrecht could complete and publish them. Ferdinand despatched these documents to Brussels on 3 September, two days before Albrecht's forces actually entered the Palatinate, although Maximilian himself had long since taken the field.⁴⁸

10

The Revolt Defeated

The Ulm treaty

The armies in Bohemia had grown larger by the spring of 1620, partly through constant recruiting and partly through contingents sent by outside sympathisers, even though many of the additional men had been required just to replace the heavy losses from hunger, disease and desertion during the winter. Nevertheless the two sides remained roughly equal, as the progress made and the help received by the one was balanced by similar gains by the other. Bigger armies also meant increased logistical and financial problems, and the Bohemians were further hampered by poor coordination of forces raised by the individual constituents of the confederation. There were also disagreements over strategy between the government and the army, as well as between Palatine and Bohemian generals in the divided command, although this was largely offset by corresponding weaknesses in the notoriously ramshackle Imperial military organisation. Hence when campaigning began again after the winter the situation looked much as it had done in the previous year, with evenly matched forces probing for opportunities and advantage, but neither looking likely to achieve a decisive victory.

Instead the critical events were taking place in Germany, and in particular in Ulm, a city strategically placed on the west bank of the Danube in central southern Germany, and an important member of the Protestant Union. To the west its territory bordered on to that of Württemberg, the largest Union member, with Baden beyond, while to the east it was separated from Bavaria only by a strip of land belonging to the bishopric of Augsburg, another member of the Catholic League. Over the spring months the Union's general, Margrave Joachim Ernst of Ansbach, had

been obliged to watch and wait as Maximilian's recruitment progressed. His plan had been to use the Danube as a defensive line against a League advance westwards, but as its army increased in size to twice that of his own he prudently concentrated his forces into a fortified camp on the Michelsberg, a substantial hill immediately outside the walls of Ulm. Maximilian waited until his League army was up to strength and then moved towards Ulm in early June, halting on the eastern side of the Danube with his forces encamped between the towns of Lauingen and Günzburg, respectively fifteen and thirty miles from the city.¹

Ansbach had an estimated 13,000 men, while Maximilian had reached the League's agreed total of 25,000 but was still recruiting, going on to reach a reported 30,000 by July. According to the *Theatrum Europaeum's* account everyone was expecting a full-scale war to break out in Germany as a result. 'On all sides there was so much arming and preparation for war that one could readily perceive that great bloodshed was scarcely to be avoided. . . . Everywhere the clang of weapons, blowing of trumpets and beating of drums was to be heard, so that it appeared as though the war actually taking place in Bohemia was only a rehearsal for the future contest in deadly earnest which was about to begin.'² That expectation was wrong, though, and general war only spread to Germany several years later.

Instead what happened around Ulm in the following few weeks demonstrated not the readiness, but the unwillingness of both sides, Union and League, Protestant and Catholic, to fight each other. That was not the war for which Maximilian had recruited his large army, and nor did it hold out the prospect of personal gain for him. He had written to his brother, the elector of Cologne, shortly before that thus far the League had aimed solely at supporting the emperor in Bohemia, as it truly wanted to avoid a war with the Union. Hence he had deliberately disregarded many good opportunities for a surprise attack, as he did not want to be the first to open hostilities.³ Maximilian's objective was the suppression of the revolt in Bohemia, but in order to proceed with that he had first to neutralise the Union army, preferably by negotiation rather than by military means.

It is commonly assumed that Ansbach was in a hopeless position, outnumbered two to one and with little choice but to negotiate or be annihilated, but that is not the case. His opponents were two days march away and had a major river crossing to contend with, so that he could have chosen to withdraw, forcing Maximilian to move even further away from Bohemia if he wished to follow. Moreover he had had plenty of time to establish a strong defensive position, and experience of long

sieges in the war between the Spanish and the Dutch in the Netherlands had shown that relatively small garrisons could hold off substantial armies almost indefinitely. Even without city walls and major earthworks an army could build a fortified camp in a matter of days, and with a good site on elevated ground this could be defended against much larger numbers for a prolonged period. There are many examples from later in the Thirty Years War.⁴ It was rarely practicable for the besiegers to seal off the perimeter of a city or camp entirely, as this could be as much as ten miles long for a large army encampment, so that some supplies got through, and sometimes reinforcements as well. This made starving out the defenders a lengthy affair during which those outside had their own supply and logistical problems to contend with. Moreover the besieging army was just as effectively pinned down as the besieged one while the campaigning season slipped fruitlessly by, which was precisely what Maximilian could not afford if he were to deal with Bohemia before the winter.

There were other dangers for him too. The greatest fear of besieging forces was an attack from the rear by a relieving army, so that they might find themselves caught between the newcomers on the one side and the defenders sallying from their camp on the other. If their army were trapped at Ulm the Protestant Union could conceivably gather additional forces by the early autumn, particularly if their previously reluctant English and Dutch allies were moved by the changed situation to contribute troops. Then there was the elector of Saxony, who had with difficulty been recruited to the coalition to attack Bohemia and was under Protestant pressure as a result. He had been signed up to help crush the revolt, not to become involved in a war against the Protestant Union. The elector, and the other substantial north German princes who had not been persuaded to go beyond neutrality towards the Bohemian campaign, might not be prepared to stand idly by while the Union were defeated, their previous differences with its leadership notwithstanding. Should a wider conflict develop in Germany, Maximilian would have no resources available to pursue his original objective, and indeed Bethlen Gabor and the Ottoman sultan might thus be encouraged to give further assistance to the Bohemians.

The duke was in a dilemma. He could not move away towards Bohemia leaving the Union army at large behind him, as he informed Ferdinand sharply, because of the risk to which this would expose to his own Bavarian homeland, but he could not attack it for fear of provoking a wider conflict which would make it impossible for his army to leave Germany.⁵ Nor was he yet sure of Spanish support, as Archduke Albrecht

was still worried about the legality of an attack on the Palatinate, while Maximilian was also concerned that he himself did not have adequate legal justification for an attack on the Union army.⁶ On the other hand he could not afford to wait either. With money already desperately short he needed urgently to move into territory which could be treated as rebellious, and hence forced to feed and finance his army.

His response was essentially bluff. On 18 June he sent envoys into Ulm, where the principals of the Union had assembled for a conference some days earlier, with an ultimatum. Either the Union should make a binding treaty guaranteeing that they would not attack any members of the Catholic League, or he would treat it as 'a manifest enemy', a form of words which carefully avoided a direct threat of the attack which it clearly implied.⁷

The Union had equal and opposite concerns to some of those which troubled Maximilian. Even if they made a stand at Ulm, none of the possible outside rescuers might actually come to their aid, while their own further recruiting might prove to be too little, too late. Their troops were untried, and outnumbered armies were prone to being further weakened by desertions, so that they might not be able to hold on as long as a more determined force. Thus they could find themselves obliged to give way later on worse terms than might be obtained at the outset, having achieved nothing other than to delay Maximilian. That might help the Bohemians and their Palatine allies, but would be of little benefit to the other Union members.

In the event it was not principally military necessity but failing political will which determined their response. The tone was set by a pessimistic letter which the duke of Württemberg and the margrave of Ansbach, the only two Union princes present in person in Ulm, sent to Friedrich in Bohemia. The situation of the Union had deteriorated since the conference in Nuremberg in December 1619, they noted, and the League had meanwhile recruited many more troops. Furthermore, they continued, the Bohemians' election of Friedrich as king had antagonised many princes of the Empire, and the Imperial ban now threatened not only Friedrich himself but anyone who hindered an execution against him.⁸ The resolution the Union had shown almost exactly a year earlier in Heilbronn, when they had decided to raise their deterrent army, had largely evaporated, as had the money which they had originally earmarked to finance it, so they decided to negotiate.

Rejecting Maximilian's ultimatum, they countered with demands of their own, first among them that any agreement should include progress

on the long-standing list of Protestant grievances which had been the subject of their delegation to Munich the previous December.⁹ Regarding the guarantee against attack, they noted that the League was ready to offer a reciprocal undertaking not to attack any member of the Union, but this did not go far enough. Archduke Albrecht was not a League member, so that the guarantee should be extended to preclude him from attacking the Palatinate. Moreover were Friedrich to be placed under the Imperial ban the emperor could appoint a suitable prince to enforce the sentence by invading and seizing the former's Palatinate territory. Such an enforcer would almost certainly have to come from the ranks of the League, with Maximilian himself by far the most likely candidate, so that the proposed treaty should specify that not only the League itself, but also all its individual members, were to be precluded from attacking any Union member, even in the guise of an Imperially appointed executor.

Sensing his opponents' weakening resolve, Maximilian declined these terms, and even when the Union gave way about an Imperial execution, although still insisting on the inclusion of Archduke Albrecht in the agreement, he remained intransigent.¹⁰ Contacts continued for more than a week, during which the Bavarian envoys made efforts to drive a wedge between the cities and the princes, but by 28 June negotiations had broken down.¹¹ Even so Maximilian wrote to Albrecht that the Union members were realising that things were not going well for them, as a result of which they were showing a greater readiness to compromise in order to avoid war.¹² Hence he took the opportunity to invite French mediation.

France had watched the war in Bohemia and the competitive recruitment in Germany with increasing concern, largely through fear that the conflict between the confessions would aggravate their own problems at home, but also because a victory for either side would have been almost equally unwelcome to them. As Catholics they did not want to see a Protestant success at any time, and certainly not when it would encourage their own dissident Huguenot minority, but a Catholic triumph would also be a Habsburg triumph, and worse still one which might lead to Spanish Habsburg control of territory uncomfortably close to France in the Palatinate. Nevertheless during the latter half of 1619 France was contemplating providing military support for the Habsburg invasion of Bohemia, responding to appeals for solidarity among Catholic monarchs against Protestant revolt despite long-standing French anti-Habsburg policy. Although there was considerable internal opposition Louis XIII's personal inclination in this direction prevailed, and planning to send

an army of some 10,000 men commenced at the end of the year. However growing problems within France led to increasing caution in the early months of 1620, so that it was first decided to mount a diplomatic initiative towards a settlement in Bohemia in parallel with sending troops, and then to give the former priority, with the army to follow only if diplomacy failed. A mission under the duke of Angoulême was duly despatched, going first to the Protestant Union meeting in Ulm, where they arrived in early June, although revolts which broke out in France in the same month caused preparations for a supporting military intervention to be abandoned entirely.¹³

The French mediators were aiming at a comprehensive settlement in which Friedrich would withdraw from the Bohemian crown, Ferdinand would be induced to come to terms with the rebels, thus denying him a military victory, and the latter would have to settle for something like the *status quo ante*, hence avoiding a successful outcome for the Protestant revolt. However they made little progress in their initial discussions with the Union in Ulm after expressing the opinion that the security of the Palatinate could only be ensured by Friedrich relinquishing the Bohemian crown. Matters came to a head on June 15, when they went further, describing him as 'a dangerous aggressor who was wilfully endangering peace in the whole of Europe', leading the Union members to conclude that they were 'very partisan'.¹⁴ Despite this the French were still in the city talking to individual representatives when the Union's subsequent negotiations with Maximilian reached deadlock and he asked them to mediate.

Maximilian was already winning the war of nerves, helped by his position as sole arbiter of the League's stance, whereas the Union side had to contend with their usual internal differences. The French envoys in Ulm also noted considerable exasperation among the Union members over Friedrich's conduct, while the Württemberg archives record that it was causing great dissatisfaction there, with anger growing month by month. There had long been tensions over the often high-handed Palatine leadership of the Union, while sympathy for Friedrich's acceptance of the Bohemian crown had been limited among the membership from the outset. Many now felt that he had exploited the Union, as well as misleading them over the attitude of his father-in-law James I. Moreover when Christian of Anhalt had been appointed to command the Bohemian forces he had taken with him Union troops intended for the defence of members' territories in Germany, including a detachment of Württemberg cavalry, but protests and demands for their return had elicited only evasions.¹⁵

Union resolution was further undermined when the French endorsed Maximilian's objections to their preconditions, arguing that the proposed treaty had to be viewed in its context as the first stage of a more comprehensive settlement of the Bohemian issue. Tellingly they added that were the Union to refuse they would be responsible for the outcome as 'promoters of an unjust war', a concept which still carried considerable weight in the early seventeenth century. Moreover the French were firmly opposed to a provision protecting the Palatinate from attack by the inclusion of Archduke Albrecht in the agreement, as privately they saw this threat as their best means of coercing Friedrich in the envisaged next stage of negotiating a general settlement.¹⁶ Their reasoning, together with the standing of Angoulême and his colleagues as outside intermediaries, increased the pressure on those Union members wishing to hold out for their conditions, while providing additional support for those willing to concede. Meanwhile yet more recruits were reaching the League army, added to which an incorrect but nonetheless disturbing report arrived that Archduke Albrecht was beginning his advance.

Maximilian proved the better poker player, keeping his problems to himself and maintaining a resolute negotiating position while doubts and dissensions grew on the Union side. Eventually the key figures, realising that matters were not going their way, decided to settle for the available terms, as the duke of Württemberg and the margrave of Ansbach themselves informed the French on 29 June. Rationalising the situation, they concluded that Archduke Albrecht could not be restricted by the non-aggression pact, as Maximilian had no authority to negotiate on his behalf, adding that they would have agreed earlier but for the 'violent entreaties' of the Palatine councillor Ludwig Camerarius.¹⁷ Hence a French-drafted treaty on essentially Maximilian's terms was concluded on 3 July.

The document was as notable for what it did not preclude as for what it did.¹⁸ Union and League members were prohibited from attacking each others' lands in Germany, but this did not apply to conflicts in Habsburg territories, which were specifically excluded from its scope. Each side was thus free to intervene in Bohemia, where either could be attacked by the other if the situation arose. Albrecht was not included and was thus free to invade the Palatinate, although if he did so the Union army could attack him there. On the other hand were the Imperial ban to be applied to Friedrich, and should Maximilian be appointed as executor, he could invade the Palatinate accordingly but could not be attacked by the Union in consequence. Consideration of the long-standing Protestant grievances was 'deferred until a more convenient

time'. The effect was to free Maximilian to start his advance on Bohemia, leaving Albrecht to threaten the Palatinate, although with the Union army prevented from attacking Bavaria or other League territories a diversionary invasion of the Palatinate was no longer really necessary. This decidedly one-sided outcome was not what the French had intended, as they had anticipated following it up with further diplomacy which would bring the war in Bohemia to an end by agreement rather than by a League and Imperialist victory, but when Angoulême's delegation reached Vienna they found that with Maximilian's army already on the march eastwards Ferdinand was not interested.

Earlier historians frequently regarded the Ulm treaty as a Union climb-down, a defeat or even a disgrace, but although it undoubtedly had serious consequences for the Bohemian revolt Gotthard, in a modern interpretation, argues that viewed strictly in terms of matters in the Empire it did not disadvantage the Union, and indeed quite the contrary. In the south, where the Catholic forces had been much the stronger, the members' territories were now guaranteed against attack (and in much of the north the Protestant princes had protection against forcible repossession of secularised church properties under the Mühlhausen agreement made a few months earlier), while the League army would be moved far away towards Bohemia. Admittedly the Union had not succeeded in excluding an attack on the Palatinate by Archduke Albrecht, but they had gained the freedom to deploy their own forces in their entirety against him to defend it. Moreover the Union had reason to fear that a rejection of the French mediation could have driven France actively over to the Habsburg side, noting that their emissary had learned of the plan to send French troops to Bohemia during a visit to Paris earlier in the year. The same man, a Württemberg councillor, welcomed the treaty, reporting back in Stuttgart that 'God gave his blessing to Ulm and averted the danger on the Danube.'¹⁹ The French themselves were less happy with the implications, as Albrecht's agent noted in early September, reporting that their chancellor had complained that 'it would not be good for France if the Spaniards gained a foothold in Germany'.²⁰

The conquest of Bohemia

Maximilian's first target was not in fact Bohemia but Upper Austria. Although small, this territory had been the most militant of the Habsburgs' internal opponents after Bohemia itself, taking a strong line in confronting their efforts at counter-Reformation from the time of

Emperor Rudolf II onwards. The estates were mainly Lutheran, but the leading personality was nevertheless the Calvinist Tschernembl, while the Catholics were only a small minority. Upper and Lower Austria were both parties to the treaty linking them to the confederation of the lands of the Bohemian crown made in August 1619, and both refused to take the oath of allegiance to Ferdinand as their prince, arguing that Archduke Albrecht, not he, was Matthias's legitimate heir, and that any transfer of the provinces from the one to the other required their assent. In the late autumn of 1619 Upper Austria also joined in the military action against Ferdinand's forces, albeit on a limited scale, but Bethlen's withdrawal from the siege of Vienna and Thurn's subsequent retreat back into Bohemia caused many to reappraise the wisdom of this course of action.

Their apprehensions were increased when a regiment of Spanish troops *en route* from Italy to join Bucquoy in Bohemia arrived in the neighbouring bishopric of Passau, where they made their winter quarters, and although there was relief when they marched on northwards in the spring the scare concentrated minds. Contacts were made with Vienna to explore a possible settlement, but although the Upper Austrians indicated a willingness to take the oath of allegiance their conditions in respect of prior guarantees for their privileges and religious freedoms were not acceptable to Ferdinand, who was by this time confident that Maximilian's army would soon settle the issue in his favour. Instead he attempted to bring the matter to a head by fixing a date for the homage ceremony, but the Upper Austrian Estates ignored the move. Events in Lower Austria initially followed a similar course, but in that province there was a significant Catholic element among the nobility, and this group, together with the more cautious of the Protestants, seized a last-minute opportunity to take the oath in mid-July, by which time Maximilian was already on the march.²¹

Arguably there were sound military reasons for moving into Austria first rather than heading directly for Bohemia. The route via Upper Austria and Budweis was certainly easier for the army, as it mainly follows river valleys, whereas the much shorter direct route towards Prague goes through the hilly forested area on the border between Bavaria and Bohemia.²² Dealing with the recalcitrant provinces one by one would also be relatively easy, thereby preventing them from despatching assistance to the Bohemians later in the campaign, as well as avoiding leaving unsecured territory in the rear as the League army marched northwards. Furthermore there was logic in joining forces with Bucquoy's Imperial army in Lower Austria before making a joint advance

into Bohemia, as combined operations at a distance were notoriously difficult in an age of poor communications and intelligence, particularly when the commanders were independent equals rather than one being subordinate to the other. Nevertheless Maximilian's personal interests carried greater weight in the decision. His first objective was to occupy territory which would either guarantee the payment of his expenses or be a valuable acquisition for Bavaria in the event of default, and in this context only Ferdinand's own provinces could be regarded as fully reliable surety. Lands in the Palatinate would only become available if the campaign were successful, and even then there were clear political risks to the tenure of property seized from defeated enemies by the emperor. Upper Austria was safe, it bordered on Bavaria, and it was a conveniently sized entity, so that it was a logical starting point which neatly matched Maximilian's requirements.

Although Maximilian accompanied the campaign in person throughout, he was himself no soldier, so that the actual military command was in the hands of his lieutenant-general, Count Johann Tserclaes Tilly, a minor nobleman from the Spanish Netherlands. A career soldier, Tilly had been in Imperial service for many years in the wars in Hungary before he was recruited by Maximilian in 1609, at the time of the foundation of the Catholic League. He was a highly experienced and successful officer, and despite being 60 years of age in 1620 he would command the League army for a further twelve years before being mortally wounded in action against Gustavus Adolphus. He was also Maximilian's type of man, a devout Jesuit-educated Catholic and an abstemious and hard-working bachelor, more like a monk, some said, than a soldier.

Once the treaty neutralising the Protestant Union army was signed, Tilly wasted no time in getting his forces on the move. Some marched all the way, while some were shipped part of the distance on the Danube, but by mid-July the whole of the main army was in Schärding, a small town on the River Inn, which at that point formed the border between Bavaria and Upper Austria. His strength was already reduced by some 8000 men, however, as they had been despatched to the northernmost part of Bavaria, near the Bohemian border some 35 miles south-west of Pilsen, in order to protect Maximilian's own territory from attack by Mansfeld's army, which was still holding the latter city.²³ Nevertheless the army at Schärding was large and well-equipped, complete with artillery, and if the Upper Austrians had any doubts about its intended employment Maximilian quickly removed them. Notifying them of his appointment as an Imperial executor, he gave them five

days to withdraw from the confederation with Bohemia and to take an oath of loyalty to Ferdinand.

With no more than 3000 soldiers and a farmer militia, the Upper Austrians had no prospect of effective resistance, despite which they attempted to avoid the inevitable by playing for time and seeking negotiations, and even after Tilly invaded in force on 25 July and quickly occupied the province they were still trying to make conditions about a surrender. Maximilian ignored them, taking over the royal castle in Linz but refusing to discuss terms, which he said were a matter for the emperor. Although Ferdinand wanted him to take strong action to suppress the Protestant religion and punish the ringleaders of the revolt he advised restraint, both to avert further resistance which might delay his advance into Bohemia and to avoid antagonising the Protestants in Germany, particularly the elector of Saxony.²⁴ Hence Maximilian stayed only long enough to arrange and conduct a homage ceremony on 25 August, in which he acted as Ferdinand's representative, although many of the estates, including Tschernembl, preferred flight to submission. By then the army was on the move again, having first compulsorily recruited the Upper Austrians' troops to replace a similar number of League men left behind to garrison the province.²⁵

Maximilian did not feel it necessary to give similar attention to Lower Austria, possibly because of the belated submission of many of its nobility to Ferdinand, but probably also because it did not have the same personal interest for him. Instead he first marched north to the Bohemian border, but was then obliged to delay and to move further east into Lower Austria in order to join up with Bucquoy, a meeting which did not take place until 8 September. Three months had passed since the newly recruited League army had advanced on Ulm in June, and time was starting to run out. November was traditionally the last month of the campaigning season, but even that was problematic and weather dependent. Autumn rains quickly made poor roads worse, slowing down troop movements and increasing supply problems, while in hilly country such as Bohemia many routes became virtually impassable for the heavy guns. With little shelter for the soldiers and their families, and little in the fields for the horses to eat, disease, desertions and deaths soon took a toll on an army's strength, while the advantage tended to shift to defending forces which were better provided for.

Against this background differences over strategy immediately arose.²⁶ Bucquoy was an officer trained in the Spanish tradition of attritional warfare, which contended that an open-field battle always involved a risk of disaster. A prudent commander should therefore stand and fight

only when in a superior position and with superior numbers, but even then as a last resort. Rather than seek out and confront an enemy army, control should be extended over territory, cities should be besieged, and resources should be denied to the opposing forces until they were too weak to resist further. It was a concept which did much to explain the long duration of the war in the Netherlands, but which also ensured that defeat was avoided even if a quick victory could not be achieved. Tilly had learned his profession in the same environment, and he was inclined to a similarly methodical approach, but he also had experience of a different kind of war in Hungary, so that he was prepared to be more venturesome when the situation demanded it.²⁷ Maximilian, with no military training or experience, was less able to appreciate the risks but more aware of the constraints of time, money and politics which required a quick resolution of the issue, certainly before the winter gave the Bohemians and their allies time to build up their forces further.

The immediate question was whether to commence an advance on Prague or to follow Christian of Anhalt and his Bohemian army, which had retreated from Lower Austria into Moravia as the League army approached. Bucquoy was strongly in favour of the latter, not in order to force Anhalt to battle but to hold him in check so that he could not besiege Vienna again as soon as the Imperialists and their allies moved north. This was exactly what the Bohemians and Bethlen had actually planned to do, and although Bucquoy was probably unaware of that he was certainly conscious of the danger of Bethlen appearing in the field in the autumn with a large and mobile army, just as he had done the previous year. Here too there was a difference of outlook between the commanders. Bucquoy was jealous of his standing as the emperor's general, and he was determined to maintain both his own independence and his master's interests, including defending his capital city. Maximilian was less concerned about Vienna and equally determined that his own objective, the defeat of the Bohemian revolt before the winter, should be given top priority. Consequently he and Tilly argued that an advance on Prague would also protect Vienna, in that Anhalt would be obliged to follow suit to defend the Bohemian capital. It was an argument which was more convenient than convincing, as Anhalt might well have called the bluff and reached Vienna first, forcing Bucquoy to turn back to relieve the city, but in the end it carried the day. Dampierre was left with a mere 6000 men to protect Vienna, and Bucquoy reluctantly joined the march north.

Smaller towns on the way were easily captured, but the substantial city of Pilsen presented a greater problem, as it was still occupied by

Mansfeld, who had first taken it in November 1618 and had retreated there again after his defeat at Záblatí in June 1619. As an outsider with a Catholic background Mansfeld had been at odds with the Bohemian generals almost from the outset, while he and they alike resented the overall command being given to Anhalt, so that he had increasingly behaved as a independent condottiere in the south west of Bohemia. Nevertheless he took an active part in Anhalt's campaign during the summer of 1620 before being sent back to Bohemia in September, where he had re-established himself in Pilsen. The Bohemians had not paid him, so that his men too were unpaid, and when the League army arrived outside the city in October he was ready to negotiate, particularly as his Bohemian service contract was due to expire shortly, and he in fact received his discharge from Friedrich at the end of that month. For Maximilian time was shorter than money by this stage, and as the city was well fortified a siege would probably have taken weeks, so he met Mansfeld's price for a truce which enabled him to march on.²⁸

Meanwhile Anhalt was indeed hurrying back to defend Prague, and the paths of the two armies almost met a short way from Pilsen. This provoked another major dispute between the League and Imperialist commanders, with Tilly now wanting to force the Bohemians to a battle whereas Bucquoy, true to his training, rejected this as too risky a venture. Maximilian was furious, reportedly threatening to withdraw his army from the campaign, but Bucquoy held firm and in the end they marched on towards Prague.

They did not get very much further before they encountered Anhalt all the same. Foreseeing the danger of being overtaken and attacked from the rear, he had used the brief respite to find a suitable defensive location and to construct a fortified camp for his army at Rakonitz (Rakovník). From there he sent out units to skirmish and to counter his opponents' attempts to find weaknesses in his position, but he was too wily to be tempted out into the field and too well defended to be dislodged from his refuge. There he stayed while a valuable week nearer the winter went by, and while the League and Imperialist commanders argued over what to do, as Bucquoy was not only unwilling to force a battle but was already thinking about going into winter quarters.²⁹ Finally Maximilian and Tilly prevailed again, and on 5 November they moved on towards Prague, taking the risk of leaving Anhalt undefeated in their rear.

As soon as they had gone he too broke camp, and with the benefit of better local knowledge he managed to overtake them without making contact, aiming to reach Prague first. He succeeded, but only

with the benefit of luck and the mismanagement of his enemies. The League army caught up with him twelve miles from the city, where with no camp prepared he would have been forced to fight, but Bucquoy's Imperialists were lagging a long way behind, depriving Tilly of numerical superiority so that he had to delay his attack. As evening drew in on 7 November it was too late, leaving Maximilian fuming at the lost opportunity, while Anhalt slipped away in time to reach the White Mountain, just outside Prague, where he arrayed his army during the night for battle.³⁰

The White Mountain, Bílá Hora in Czech, is in truth no more than an area of higher ground on the western outskirts of modern Prague, a tram ride from the centre and today mostly built up on the city side, although still open and overlooking the airport on the other. Nevertheless it provided a good defensive position for an army drawn up along the ridge, so that even though Anhalt's numbers were slightly smaller, estimated at 23,000 men against 25,000 for Tilly and Bucquoy combined, and he was significantly weaker in both infantry and heavy cavalry, he still had a clear tactical advantage over his opponents.³¹ Not only would they have to attack uphill, a significant hindrance for men carrying heavy weapons, as well as for the cavalry horses, but they could not see the disposition of the opposing forces on the top, so that they knew neither how strong they were nor exactly where the main formations were deployed.

Anhalt had intended to strengthen his defensive position further by digging in along the ridge, but there had not been time, a problem aggravated by the tiredness and reluctance of his men. Instead, as a Bohemian officer recorded: 'Our men, weary and exhausted from marching, skirmishing and standing watch day after day, as well as suffering from hunger and thirst due to lack of money, laid themselves down beside their weapons for a bit of rest.'³² However there was one further helpful feature of the lie of the land for Anhalt, a marshy stream running across the lower ground in front of the ridge and spanned only by a single bridge. Crossing this would be a risky manoeuvre for his opponents, exposing them to a counter-attack before their full strength was across, and at the same time cutting off their retreat. Tilly ventured it nevertheless, taking advantage of the foggy morning early on 8 November without consulting the cautious Bucquoy. His boldness was rewarded, as although the move was observed and Thurn and others wanted to strike back at him the equally cautious Anhalt refused, thus allowing not only Tilly's League forces but subsequently also Bucquoy's Imperialists to cross this obstacle.

Even after this initial success Bucquoy did not want to risk an immediate attack, leading to yet another fierce dispute with Maximilian and Tilly. Eventually he was persuaded to agree, not to a battle but to a major skirmish, a probing manoeuvre so conducted that it could be broken off if necessary, rather than a fully committed action which would lead either to victory or defeat. This compromise also had a serious military purpose, that of establishing the strength and depth of the Bohemian positions as the basis for deciding whether, where and when to attack in earnest.

This initial advance began around noon, led by an Imperialist force on the right wing of the combined army, while Tilly's men progressed more slowly on the left, where the slope up to the ridge was steeper. Major-general Maximilian Liechtenstein, the officer commanding the Imperialist attack, reported that at first the Bohemians fought back so bravely that his cavalry was repulsed with heavy casualties, among them a number of aristocratic senior officers, but instead of breaking off the action he decided to commit his reserves and renew the assault. Thurn, in command of the Bohemian forces on this wing, duly deployed his own cavalry reserve and an infantry regiment to meet the thrust, but most of the men fired off their weapons uselessly at long range, and as Thurn himself recorded, 'then, without any good reason, turned ... and resorted to flight'.³³

The battle was by no means over, but this set-back, following the failure to prevent Tilly from crossing the stream earlier, meant that the Bohemians had largely lost the advantages of their defensive position, and most of their cannon had also been captured. The fleeing men spread panic, and although some units, notably one led by Anhalt's son, fought bravely, others were only too willing to quit the field at the first opportunity. As with most battles of this period, and indeed much later, as the duke of Wellington noted after Waterloo, the precise course of events is difficult to reconstruct with any certainty, but the whole action lasted little more than an hour and a half, by which time the remnants of the Bohemian army were hastening back to the sheltering walls of Prague as fast as they could go.

Afterwards Anhalt blamed almost everything except himself. 'Not the king of Bohemia nor the army commanders' were responsible for the Bohemian collapse, he insisted, 'and still less was it due to the special courage or skill at arms of the opponents. The main cause was the more than shameful cowardice and unnecessary flight of the soldiery, both cavalry and infantry.' However he was probably right in identifying the poor morale of his troops as the principal difference between the two

sides. 'The courage and valour of our men did not simply fail all at once in the battle, but day by day long before, and the longer it went on the worse it became.' The reason, he said, was that 'because of lack of pay discipline broke down, and the soldiers mostly became refractory and eventually lapsed into desperation. . . . Scarcely a week went by without some form of mutiny, and the insolence became such that it was virtually impossible to maintain the command.'³⁴ Hence a large part of the responsibility for the defeat must lie with the Bohemian leadership and Friedrich's government, who left their army cold, hungry and unpaid the previous winter, while lack of pay with which to buy food exacerbated the further hardships to which they had been exposed over the summer. The men and their families had no reason to hope for better in the winter to come, so that it is hardly surprising that many were more inclined to look to their own safety than to stand and fight on the Bohemian behalf.

Maximilian's army was better provided for, but it fared equally badly against the greatest hazard faced by soldiers of the day, namely epidemics, which were unusually prevalent and severe in 1620. One study looked at the numbers of troops joining and being detached from the League army, including casualties, between Ulm and the White Mountain, and this estimated a discrepancy of between 12,000 and 15,000 men, which the author attributed to deaths from disease. Even allowing for the unreliability of the numbers, and noting that adjustments are necessary for desertions and for men who were not dead but ill, injured or otherwise unfit for combat, these figures still indicate a massive death toll from epidemics. The families and other people in the accompanying baggage train, almost a second army, as Maximilian's court preacher described it in his campaign diary, will have suffered no less.³⁵

As the battle raged King Friedrich was at lunch with English ambassadors in Prague castle, 'where, for ought wee could discover, there was confidence enough, and opinion that both the armyes were apter to decline than give a battell', as they observed.³⁶ By the time he left with his large escort to take the field himself the first fleeing survivors were already reaching the city. Many more followed, but they were demoralised and disorganised refugees rather than a fighting force, while their leaders were little better and too dispirited to mobilise them to man the defences. There were exceptions, Thurn's son and the Austrian Tschernembl reportedly among them, who pointed out that the besiegers would soon be suffering from the cold and bad weather and even suggested sallying out to attack them in their camps.³⁷ They found little support at the council of war in the city that night, as most others,

Friedrich foremost among them, were more concerned with planning for flight at the first opportunity the following morning.

Flee they did, Friedrich going first to Silesia but soon having to move on until he eventually reached safety in Holland. Anhalt went further, taking refuge with the Scandinavian monarchs, but the defeat and the fact that his son was in Imperial hands after being wounded and captured at the White Mountain restrained him from any further participation in the war, and three years later he not only secured a royal pardon but even recovered his little principality. Thurn too escaped, and like many others he sought briefly to make his peace with Ferdinand, but he soon realised that there was to be no peace, and before long he was in Constantinople with a delegation sent by Bethlen Gabor to try to elicit support from the Turkish sultan for a further campaign against the emperor.³⁸ Thereafter he continued to be actively involved in the war against Ferdinand for a further twelve years, much of the time in Swedish service, until at the age of 65 he was captured and then released into enforced retirement by Wallenstein.

Those who stayed behind were not so fortunate, the ordinary people of Prague foremost among them. Maximilian entered the city at noon on the day after the battle, only a few hours after Friedrich and his companions had fled, and the men from the victorious armies streamed in after him, intent on taking what they considered to be their just reward. In this period it was accepted practice for a city taken by storm to be given over to the troops for looting for a defined period, usually no more than a day, both as recompense for the dangers they had faced and as a punishment for the citizens for not surrendering in good time, as well as a warning to others. Prague had not been taken by storm, and it was Ferdinand's own capital, as king of Bohemia, rather than an enemy city, but it was looted by his Imperialist troops and his League allies none the less, and over a prolonged period rather than for a single day.

Soon after the capture of the city an emissary of the elector of Saxony reported that the soldiers 'thirst after nothing but blood and money', and another eyewitness added that Bucquoy was allowing his soldiers to plunder at will, 'for no other reason than that on top of all the robbery he wants to extract many thousand taler from Prague as protection money'. Even a month later a correspondent from the city noted: 'There is no end to the robbery and murders here. To start with they plundered the houses of the directors and the Calvinists, but now they make no distinctions and steal from everybody in the streets.'³⁹ Maximilian himself complained about the conduct of Bucquoy's troops in a letter of 16 November to Ferdinand. 'They murder, rob and plunder both

Catholics and non-Catholics. . . . The Catholics, who were and are loyal to Your Majesty, are protected no more than the rebels, and they like others are abducted, robbed and held to ransom, which does little to develop support and affection for Your Majesty.⁴⁰ What he did not point out to Ferdinand was that his Imperial army had been as little paid and provided for as the Bohemian forces, as the English ambassadors noted, and were likewise facing the winter with no prospects other than hunger and cold for themselves and their families.⁴¹ Nor did he mention that while his own troops may have been better paid and fed, and thus better behaved, their superiors had not failed to line their own pockets. One of the Bavarian officials who arrived in Prague in his entourage boasted that he had acquired 60,000 gulden in Bohemia in plunder and extorted payments, adding that in his view it would be an incompetent colonel or captain who had not taken at least 30,000 gulden as booty in this war.⁴²

There were certainly rich pickings to be had, as in their haste Friedrich and his Palatine officials had left behind much that they had intended to take with them. When Prague castle was captured 'eight loaded wagons were standing there, and on them were the fleeing king's best things, but they were all looted', according to a contemporary report, while another added that the crown of Bohemia and the king's regalia were also found in Prague.⁴³ Equally valuable politically were Friedrich's official correspondence and Anhalt's chancellery wagon, which yielded enough material to keep the Bavarian publishers busy with propaganda for a long time. Mockery also served political ends. Friedrich was King James I of England's son-in-law, and among the things found in Prague was his Order of the Garter, so that cartoonists thereafter depicted him with his stockings hanging down. A Frenchman took the jesting further, as a Saxon agent reported on 18 November, riding naked through the streets, facing backwards and holding his horse's tail, while his obscene attacks on the departed Friedrich were accompanied by the screeching and scraping of three fiddlers.⁴⁴ Flysheets lampooning the 'Winter King' and his brief reign soon appeared, and the epithet has stuck to Friedrich ever since.

There were more serious matters to be attended to. When the Bohemian Estates faced Maximilian three days after the battle their spokesman was Wilhelm Lobkowitz, who, 'in a whining voice and with tears in his eyes', said that they realised how much they had offended against his Imperial Majesty, for which they were bitterly sorry, and they humbly beseeched his forgiveness, as never again would they recognise any other lord than Ferdinand II.⁴⁵ This was formally confirmed at an Estates meeting attended by many of the leaders of the revolt who had

remained in Prague, among them Ruppa and Budowetz, where a declaration was made that they recognised Ferdinand as their lawful king and asked for a pardon. Publicly Maximilian promised to intercede for them, but privately he advised Ferdinand to be severe:

If Your Majesty does not take this opportunity to remove all the ringleaders from the scene, to punish them as they deserve and as an example to others, and at the same time to take back the forfeit privileges from which all this trouble sprang, then Your Majesty can expect one problem after another. Your Majesty should not be misled by the intercession I put forward on behalf of the Estates of this province, which you requested that I should not publicly refuse. The situation is ripe; the iron is hot. Your Majesty must not miss the time and the opportunity, as our opponents are vigilant and unyielding.⁴⁶

On 17 November, the day after writing this letter, Maximilian felt able to go home, so having first installed Prince Karl Liechtenstein as deputy commissioner in his place he departed for Munich, leaving military mopping-up operations, including the occupation of the rest of Bohemia, to others. Johann Georg of Saxony had waited until the Imperialist and League forces had invaded Bohemia and looked to be gaining the upper hand before he made any move himself, whereupon Lusatia had quickly surrendered, and over the winter he completed his conquest of Silesia. The Silesian commander, the margrave of Jägerndorf, was determined to continue resistance, but he moved into Moravia early in 1621, pursued by units of Bucquoy's army, while Johann Georg took a conciliatory line in the territories he had occupied. Although he imposed fines he was able both to guarantee the rights of the Protestants there, and to coerce the reluctant Ferdinand into accepting this, as well as sparing the estates the reprisals which took place in Bohemia and Moravia.⁴⁷

The invasion of the Palatinate

Under the terms of the Ulm treaty earlier in the year both sides had been required to withdraw their forces immediately from the area, and not to replace them there.⁴⁸ This not only freed Maximilian to move towards Bohemia, but also removed the threat of the Union army close to the border of his Bavarian homeland when Ansbach marched it off to the Lower Palatinate. This part of the electorate comprised a patchwork of territories on the western side of the Rhine, extending from just north of

modern Karlsruhe to Bacharach, together with a smaller but more compact section east of the Rhine and south of Mainz, including Friedrich's capital city of Heidelberg. Most of the lands west of the Rhine did not actually belong to Friedrich, as they were sub-divisions of the Palatinate owned by other branches of his family, but ironically these were among the first areas occupied by the Spanish forces and made up three-quarters of the territory in their hands by the end of 1620.⁴⁹

Archduke Albrecht had originally envisaged a campaign in which the Union army would be confronted with his own advance from the west and with the League army coming from the east, but the terms of the treaty of Ulm precluded the latter, as did Maximilian's need to hasten towards Bohemia before time and money ran out completely. Concerns about facing the Union alone thus added to Albrecht's unease about the necessary legal justification, but the preparations were already in hand and had acquired a momentum of their own. Hence he set about recruiting additional men, placing the invasion in the charge of Spain's leading general, Ambrosio Spinola, but it was well into August and Tilly's campaign in Upper Austria was virtually over before they began to move.⁵⁰

The mustering place was Koblenz, in the lands of the elector of Trier, where Spinola himself arrived on 18 August. A few days later he marched his army east towards Frankfurt am Main and then to Mainz, where he crossed the Rhine on 5 September, moving on south to enter Palatine territory for the first time and to threaten the town of Oppenheim. Ansbach moved to meet him, and on 8 September the two armies faced each other in battle order, but no action followed. True to his Spanish military training, Spinola preferred a war of attrition, and in any case his objective was not to fight and defeat the Union army but to occupy the Palatinate. Hence he slipped away, dividing his forces and sending them to take one town after another, while Ansbach tried, largely in vain, to follow or pre-empt them. In early October the latter received reinforcements, a large troop of Dutch cavalry under Prince Frederick Henry of Orange and over 2000 English volunteers under the command of Horace de Vere, while Spinola, his attempt to intercept them having failed, sent for reinforcements of his own from the Netherlands.⁵¹

The campaign was by no means one-sided, although limited to skirmishes, and in some cases Union forces re-took places which had been captured by the Spanish, but nevertheless Spinola steadily extended his hold on the Palatinate west of the Rhine, garrisoning the towns and extracting contributions from the population to finance his army. He repeatedly evaded Union attempts to bring him to battle, tactics

which achieved their purpose in wearing down his opponents and leaving them frustrated and discouraged as winter approached, even before the news of the defeat at the White Mountain reached them on about 20 November. The prince of Orange and his men went home, de Vere ensconced his English troops in the fortress of Frankenthal, one of the few places in the Palatinate west of the Rhine still holding out, and Spinola was able to disperse his men into winter quarters in the occupied territory.⁵²

Aftermath

The reprisals in Bohemia and Moravia did not begin immediately, as Ferdinand bided his time, creating a lull in which many of those who had been involved in the revolt began to feel safe enough to remain in Bohemia, or even to return after making a hasty exit initially. Any who could half-credibly do so were quick to try to distance themselves from the immediate past. In Moravia 'barely three or four members had joined the uprising out of conviction', or so the Estates claimed to Vienna. The rest, they said, had only participated because of the overwhelming force Thurn had brought with him. The previously discredited moderate Zierotin was now a convenient example of Moravian loyalty.⁵³ In Prague the immensely wealthy knight Rudolf Trčka congratulated the Imperial government on its successful return, complaining vociferously of what he had suffered during the revolt, despite actually having held an official position and been in good standing with the rebel leadership throughout. Nevertheless he managed not only to evade any responsibility but to re-establish himself on the winning side, so that he was able to add to his wealth by participating in the spoils.⁵⁴ The fleet-footedness of the Kinsky brothers was even more remarkable. One of them, Ulrich, who had died on campaign, could scarcely have excused himself, as he was one of the five men who threw Martinitz from the window, but Wenzel and Wilhelm, the latter one of the original thirty directors, were nevertheless able to minimise and obfuscate their involvement, to the extent that they were likewise able to retain their properties and to profit from the misfortunes of others. Schlick's cousin Heinrich had fought as a Bohemian colonel at the White Mountain, but he was equally quick to accommodate himself to the outcome, and to the Imperialists and their church. As a result he not only escaped any punishment but was able to continue his military career in the Imperial army, ultimately reaching the rank of field marshal and becoming president of the Imperial war council.⁵⁵

Most of the more prominent were not so adroit, but they remained at liberty for over three months after the capture of Prague. During this period Ferdinand first appointed a commission to deal with the rebels, and this in turn made its preparations. At its head was Liechtenstein, who had by then been appointed to the new post of governor of Bohemia, and there were several Bohemians among the number, although some of the former regents declined to serve. As a first step the commission acted against any who had been involved but were already dead, declaring their property forfeit to the crown, while all those who had fled abroad were sentenced to death *in absentio* and likewise expropriated. However it was not until 20 February 1621 that Liechtenstein finally received Ferdinand's order to arrest all the members of the directorate who remained within reach, together with some thirty others. To apprehend so many without any escaping was potentially problematic, so instead they were all ordered to report to Prague castle at a specific time in order be informed of an Imperial decree. They duly did so, with fine irony assembling in the same room from which Martinitz and Slavata had been thrown, where they were arrested without difficulty.

Legal preparations occupied another month, during which a carefully chronological 236-point questionnaire was drawn up, covering events from the assembly of the defensors before the defenestration through to the actions of Friedrich's government during the final stages of the revolt. This was to form the basis of the subsequent proceedings, although these seem to have constituted little more than extended interrogations rather than full trials in accordance with established Bohemian legal practice. The court was opened formally on 29 March, with hearings following during April, and the answers to the list of questions given by each of the individual accused were summarised and recorded. All were found guilty.

The great majority, more than thirty, were condemned to death, but the full sentences were punctiliously differentiated by the addition of further tortures and degradations, betraying the medieval attitude to punishment which persisted in the Habsburg empire. Most were to be beheaded, but a few of the lower orders were to be hanged. Some of those to be beheaded were to be quartered or to have their right hands, or in one case his tongue, cut off beforehand, with the respective body parts to be put on public display afterwards. Others were only to be beheaded, but in some cases their heads were likewise to be put on display, whereas in others the execution itself was deemed to suffice. As a bizarre and supposedly lesser punishment one man was to be nailed to

the gallows by his tongue for a period of one hour, a sentence which was in fact carried out, although the victim died as a result. This and the severings of hands or tongue were supposed to reflect the aggravation of individual transgressions by written or spoken treason, while the various combinations of the other aspects were intended to match the respective degrees of guilt. The dozen who were not to be executed, mostly minor figures, received sentences ranging from exile or imprisonment 'at the emperor's pleasure' down to one year in irons, while all, whatever the rest of their punishment, were to have their property confiscated.

Meanwhile Schlick, who had originally escaped, had been arrested by the Saxons and returned to Prague, so that his case had also to be dealt with, and it was 17 May before Liechtenstein was able to despatch the list of convictions and sentences to Ferdinand in Vienna, while he himself made appeals for clemency in several cases. The emperor promptly passed the sentences on to a committee of councillors for consideration, where the sheer number of the proposed executions caused some concern, particularly to one of the most senior members, Peter Stralendorf. He argued that they should be reduced to nine, three from each estate, although others countered that his suggested alternative of condemnation to the Spanish galleys for the remainder was scarcely more merciful. In the end they recommended commutation of only a small number of the death sentences, although Stralendorf's complaint that the proposed quartering was 'an atrocity' found more support, and it was 'mercifully' agreed, so the judgement said, that this and the severing of hands should be carried out only after death. Nevertheless the unfortunate Dr Jessenius, a famous scholar, still had to suffer having his tongue cut out before beheading, as he had attracted particular ire through the employment of his talents against the Habsburgs early in the revolt, until he had been captured while on a mission abroad.⁵⁶

Ferdinand could not avoid the final responsibility, as he had to confirm the eventual punishments and sign the execution warrants. Exemplary sentences had been anticipated after the arrests, but many had also expected the emperor to reprieve most of those condemned to death, so a Saxon envoy had noted in March. Ferdinand himself was reportedly troubled, and after a sleepless night he consulted his confessor Lamormaini to ask whether he could in good conscience pardon them or whether it was his duty to confirm the sentences. He found little help there, the Jesuit responding simply that both possibilities were open to His Majesty. Left to make his own decision, Ferdinand duly signed twenty-eight death warrants, supposedly with tears in his eyes and with trembling hands.⁵⁷ It may be true, or it may have been good

policy to be reported as showing such concern. What is certain is that he then promptly left on a minor pilgrimage, writing to urge Liechtenstein to press on with the executions so that they should be over and done with well before his return, when he proposed finally to visit Prague.⁵⁸

Historians have commented upon an apparent class distinction in the punishments, with many more of the 27 men eventually executed coming from the citizenry than from the nobility, but this is rather misleading. Of the original thirty directors, ten from each estate, twelve were executed, two lords, four knights and six citizens, but six of the other lords were either already dead or had escaped abroad, against only two of the citizens. One lord and two knights who later held office were also executed, and only six of the directors who were actually apprehended escaped death, two from each of the three estates. Of the remaining twelve who were executed but had not been directors, all but one were indeed from the citizenry, but this reflects the fact that the participation of the nobility in the management of the revolt was principally as directors, while the next level was manned by the lower orders.

The one exception in this latter group was the most unfortunate, the Catholic knight who had commanded the Prague castle guard on the day of the defenestration, who was blamed for allowing the Protestant estates to enter, despite his defence that he was acting on orders from the regent Sternberg.⁵⁹ The most fortunate, on the other hand, was Wilhelm Lobkowitz, who was, as indicated in Chapter 7, clearly one of the most guilty at the defenestration, but managed to secure the commutation of his original death sentence because of the influential position of other members of his family in the Habsburg administration. Paul Říčan, another lord who had been prominent at the defenestration, was similarly fortunate, while the lawyer Fruewein cheated the axe by escaping his guards and either falling or jumping from the wall of Prague Castle a few days beforehand. Nevertheless his head and his right hand were cut off and his dead body was quartered by the executioner on the White Mountain two days later (and he is included in the number of citizens noted above as executed).⁶⁰

Ferdinand had originally insisted that the condemned men should only be allowed the religious comfort of Catholic priests, despite the fact that all but one were Protestants, but following representations from Liechtenstein he eventually conceded first that they could receive Lutheran pastors in prison beforehand and then that these could accompany them to the scaffold, although Calvinist ministers remained excluded.⁶¹ On the morning of 21 June 1621 the executions themselves

took place on a black-draped scaffold in front of the Prague city hall, watched by Liechtenstein, the other judges and city officials. Strict security was maintained, the city gates were kept shut, and troops guarded the square while squads of cavalry patrolled the neighbouring streets. Eight drummers were stationed by the scaffold in order to drown out any attempted hostile speeches by the victims, although at least two, including Dr Jessenius, nevertheless tried. One man was reprieved at the last minute, as he was already kneeling at the block, apparently in response to the intercession of a canon from the cathedral, although this had clearly been pre-arranged for effect.⁶² Even in death there was a grim order of precedence, so that Count Schlick was the first to die, followed by Budowetz, before the knights and the citizens followed in their turns. Twelve of the twenty-four who were beheaded with the sword were elderly, the oldest aged 86, while two wealthy Prague citizens were also hanged from the windows of the city hall and another from a gallows in the market square.⁶³ The whole macabre process kept the executioner at work from five until nine in the morning.

Where proceedings are delayed the punishments are often less severe, and this was the case in Moravia, where the corresponding trial eventually opened in Brünn at the end of June 1622, with Dietrichstein as president and nine other judges, the majority of whom had already served at the trial in Prague. Sentences of death and loss of all property were pronounced on 2 September, but only on those who were already dead or had escaped. Announcement of sentences on those actually in custody was delayed while Ferdinand hesitated over whether to confirm death sentences, eventually deciding against. Hence the outcome, announced on 3 November, was mainly lengthy terms of imprisonment and loss of property.⁶⁴

Among the most fortunate in the longer term, along with Anhalt, was another of Ferdinand's most determined former opponents, the leading director and Friedrich's one-time chancellor in Bohemia, Wenzel Ruppá. He managed to escape from Prague without being arrested, but despairing of his situation in exile he wrote to Zdeněk Lobkowitz in 1627, begging for forgiveness and seeking to excuse his previous behaviour 'with all kinds of lies'. Remarkably, he was successful, Ferdinand perhaps for once agreeing on grounds of political expediency, and Ruppá was able to return to Bohemia.⁶⁵

Spectacularly gruesome although the executions were, the wave of confiscations and the religious repression which followed were ultimately more significant. The resulting emigrations produced a large number of embittered and impoverished exiles eager to fight for

Ferdinand's successive enemies during the next phases of the Thirty Years War, while those remaining in Bohemia formed a potential fifth column ready to welcome those enemies when they invaded.

The property of the convicted rebels was automatically forfeit, but that was only the beginning. In January 1622 a special court was set up to investigate those accused of complicity in the revolt, and to confiscate the lands of those found guilty. Those who had been executed, or had died in arms during the revolt, or had fled the country, were automatically liable to full expropriation. Others less seriously implicated forfeited only a proportion of their property, the most fortunate as little as a fifth, but even in such cases everything was confiscated, and the owners were entitled only to monetary compensation for the balance, most of which proved very difficult to secure in practice. The scale was staggering, affecting around a thousand families, two-thirds of them in Bohemia and one-third in Moravia, while half of Bohemia's total land area, or even more according to some estimates, changed hands as a result. Vast areas of land passed into the control of the Imperial treasury and became available for sale at knock-down prices to purchasers deemed loyal to the regime, in what constituted not only massive punishment but also a concerted effort to break the economic and political power of the landed Protestant nobility and gentry. And of course the emperor desperately needed the money to meet the costs of the war.⁶⁶

A first draft bill for Maximilian's expenses is extant in the Munich archives, and with remarkable precision the total comes to 16,000,771 florins 40 Kreuzer and 1 Heller, the latter being the smallest coin then in circulation. Part of these costs were offset against supplies provided by the emperor, so that eventually a sum of 13 million florins, including interest, was agreed, against which the Upper Palatinate was transferred to Maximilian in settlement.⁶⁷ Even so it was not until 1628 that Ferdinand recovered control of Upper Austria, while he was never able to pay his corresponding debt to Johann Georg of Saxony, who consequently retained Lusatia in perpetuity.

For Ferdinand personally the opportunity for a Catholic revival was one of the principal fruits of victory. He had long before shown his willingness to pursue a policy of militant recatholicisation in Styria, and he was ready, albeit somewhat more cautiously, to repeat this in Bohemia and Moravia. The defeated Protestants had been under no illusions in this respect, as the English ambassadors had reported shortly after the battle of the White Mountain. The Imperialists, they said, 'holde Bohemia now by conquest and all immunities, priveledges and lettres

of reversall voyde, and if a new establishmente shoulde be obtained by petition, it will bee only the lawe of the conquerour'.⁶⁸

Ferdinand's first target was the Bohemian Brethren, followed by the Lutherans and then by the remaining elements of Hussite Utraquism, but although the process of reversing the Reformation had to proceed step by step in view of the political and military situation its progress was nevertheless inexorable.⁶⁹ This did not affect Silesia and Lusatia, as the elector of Saxony took steps to protect the confessional rights of the Protestants, while Hungary was also exempted due to the continuing military threat from Bethlen Gabor. Nevertheless Ferdinand's recatholicisation in Bohemia and Moravia, together with similar policies applied in Austria itself, effectively eliminated a major source of dissension and created a high degree of confessional unity within most of the Habsburg hereditary lands, as well as largely removing the pressure for Estates rights.

Political reform was also on the agenda, and here Ferdinand did not neglect Maximilian's advice 'to take back the forfeit privileges from which all this trouble sprang'. It was no longer a matter of arguing over traditional rights, but of Ferdinand dictating by right of conquest, and he and his advisers were determined that such privileges should be retained only insofar as they did not diminish his own authority as king. The new political order was not finally formalised until the Renewed State Ordinance of 1627, but this document then took Bohemia away from any concept of Estates government and well on the way towards the monarchic absolutism of the following century. The reforms were not restricted to Bohemia, and similar measures were adopted in the other Habsburg hereditary lands, although on an individual basis which took account of their pre-existing structures. Only Hungary retained essentially its old form of government.⁷⁰

11

From Bohemia to the Thirty Years War

The Palatine question

The traditional starting date for the Thirty Years War is 1618, implicitly on 23 May, the day of the defenestration, although significant military hostilities did not commence until August of that year. According to the usual interpretation described in Chapter 1, the Empire and indeed much of Europe were only awaiting a trigger for the near-inevitable general conflict to break out. Hence it might be expected that after two and a half years, by the time of the battle of the White Mountain on 8 November 1620, this wider war would have been well under way. Quite the contrary was the case. Outside the Palatinate, barely a shot had been fired in Germany, and military action had been limited to a few minor cavalry skirmishes. Spinola's Spanish army had occupied the Palatinate west of the Rhine in three months of minor sieges and cat-and-mouse manoeuvres, and it was already moving into winter quarters, while after the defeat of the Bohemians the Protestant Union army was looking for a face-saving excuse to disband, as was the Union itself.¹ The latter had received some financial and military help from England and the Dutch, although little more than their minimum commitments under the long-standing alliance treaties, but no other supporters, whether German territories or foreign powers, had rallied to the cause with practical assistance. The logical next question is thus why did the war spread to Germany from 1621 onwards when it had not done so before?

In Bohemia, Moravia and Austria there were few constraints on Ferdinand's freedom of action after the defeat of the revolt, in that he was not only the ruling prince, but was also able to claim an effective right of conquest over rebels to justify drastic measures. The Palatinate was another matter altogether, as there were both legal and political limitations on his powers as emperor. In the end Archduke Albrecht

had overcome his scruples about invading the Palatinate without a valid mandate to enforce an Imperial ban, recognising that Friedrich could not be publicly outlawed at the time in the face of the objections of the elector of Saxony. Consequently the occupying Spanish troops were, to say the least, in a delicate legal position, and one which was barely improved by the polite sophistry that they were the army of the Burgundian Netherlands, the principal member of the Burgundian Circle of the Empire, rather than of a foreign power. Consequently the question of placing Friedrich under the Imperial ban was immediately back on the agenda after his defeat and flight.

This, and indeed most of the subsequent history of this phase of the Thirty Years War, was greatly complicated by the problem of Emperor Ferdinand II's commitments to Duke Maximilian of Bavaria, both the formal one to repay his military expenses and the confidential one to transfer to him Friedrich's electoral title. Maximilian was well aware from the outset that there was little chance of the perennially over-indebted Imperial treasury being able to cover his costs in a reasonable space of time, if ever, which was why he had begun his Bohemian campaign by occupying Upper Austria for himself. This, however, was a temporary expedient, as he also recognised that Ferdinand would make every effort to recover this integral part of the Habsburg hereditary lands, so that he would eventually need to be compensated in some other way.² Confiscation of the property of the Bohemian rebels had been foreseen, but the proceeds were needed to fund Ferdinand's own military expenses and to pay off his troops, as well as to reward loyalists. That left Friedrich's Palatinate.

Once the Ulm treaty had secured League territories against the danger of a Union attack as soon as Maximilian's army moved away into Bohemia, there was little military reason for the Spanish invasion of the western Palatinate. Arguably this was to prevent the Union army following Maximilian into Bohemia, where it would have been free to attack him, and this was doubtless a factor in the cautious duke's planning, but a Spanish army ostentatiously mobilised on the Netherlands frontier or moved into League territory adjacent to the Palatinate, as it actually was before the invasion, might well have had the same effect. On the other hand occupying Friedrich's territory would make it a great deal easier to dispossess him permanently afterwards, as no new military campaign would then be required, and it would be surprising if this too was not in Maximilian's calculations.

Friedrich had nevertheless first to be given the opportunity to submit, if only to placate the elector of Saxony, who even after the defeat

of the rebels was still in an influential position, as he was in possession of not only Lusatia as a pledge for his costs, but also of the larger and much more valuable province of Silesia.³ Hence negotiations began in January 1621, with Saxon mediation, but although Elector Johann Georg, as well as the kings of England and Denmark, advised Friedrich to make peace, and he agreed in principle to withdraw from Bohemia and to accept Ferdinand as its king, his conditions were so extreme that there was no realistic chance of a settlement. The Letter of Majesty was to be confirmed and all the original complaints of the Bohemian Estates were to be remedied, the Palatinate was to be evacuated and restored to Friedrich, Ferdinand was to pay off the Bohemian troops and to assume all Friedrich's Bohemian debts, as well as refunding the latter's other expenses, prisoners of war, including Anhalt's son, were to be released, and all who had served Friedrich as king of Bohemia, in whatever capacity, were to be freed from any penalties.⁴ This uncompromising stance solved the problem for Ferdinand, encouraging him to override the continuing opposition of the elector of Saxony, and even of his own privy councillors, who advised that a ban should be deferred at least until the complicated and controversial question of the transfer of the electoral title had been resolved.⁵ On 22 January he duly applied the Imperial ban to Friedrich, following this up a few days later with an official mandate authorising Maximilian to enforce it in the Palatinate.⁶

Those with armies already in the Palatinate were not anxious to renew the conflict. Spinola was uncomfortably aware that the truce between Spain and the Dutch was due to expire in April, and he was looking to transfer a large number of his troops back to the Netherlands as soon as possible, while many of the Union members were ready 'to be rid once and for all of this pernicious Union'.⁷ The three-year extension of the alliance had been agreed only with difficulty in 1617, and experience since then had reinforced the concerns of the cities and added to the number of doubters among the princes, so that the few who remained belligerently inclined found little support at a poorly attended conference which began in February in Heilbronn. The Palatinate's neighbours were similarly concerned to avoid further hostilities in their vicinity, so that with the mediation of Catholic Mainz and Lutheran Hessen-Darmstadt an agreement to disengage was reached in April, leaving only the Palatinate's own small forces and the mainly English garrison at Frankenthal in the field against the Spanish.⁸ In addition to a truce the Union members had also to agree to withdraw all their troops from Palatine territory, to give Friedrich no further support or assistance, and neither to extend the life of the alliance nor to form a new one.⁹ Thus

not only the army but the Union itself were effectively disbanded and played no further part in subsequent events.

The League was more circumspect, but its members too were looking to scale back their commitments at a parallel meeting held in Augsburg. There were also complaints from the Rhine section of the association, particularly the electors of Mainz and Trier, that the League's forces were being used only to support the emperor instead of to protect the lands of the members. Nevertheless it was agreed to finance the army for a further six months, albeit its size was to be reduced to 15,000 men, an arrangement which benefited principally Maximilian, as he needed the League forces for the conquest of the Upper Palatinate and to strengthen his position in seeking his rewards from the emperor.¹⁰

Not everyone was peaceably inclined. Friedrich in particular, faced with losing not only the Bohemian crown but also all his other possessions, was determined to fight on. Moreover the hard Imperial line being taken against him was beginning to elicit more sympathy for his cause than had previously been the case, among others from his father-in-law James I of England and his wife's uncle Christian IV of Denmark. Neither had supported the Bohemian rebels, both had advised Friedrich not to accept the crown, and both continued to urge him to make his peace with the emperor following the defeat of the revolt, but the imposition of the Imperial ban and the occupation of the Rhineland Palatinate, especially by Spanish troops, was more than they were prepared to accept. Christian was also wary of Habsburg successes in general, but particularly of Ferdinand's reputation and intentions as a Catholic counter-reformer. By the beginning of 1620 he had been sufficiently alarmed to consider recruiting troops to defend Denmark's own interests if necessary, although this had met with no support from his royal council, while his offer to mediate between Ferdinand and the Bohemians had not elicited positive responses.¹¹ In March 1621 Christian took the lead in convening a meeting in the Holstein town of Segeberg, with the intention of forming a Protestant united front determined to prevent the emperor from exploiting his victory.

The attendance was impressive, with both England and the United Provinces joining Denmark, along with representatives of the Lower Saxon Circle, Brandenburg and the Protestant Union, although Sweden was a notable absentee, and Saxony and its confederates predictably declined to support the endeavour. Nevertheless the gathering agreed to issue Ferdinand with a comprehensive set of demands, and to raise a joint army of 30,000 men to enforce them if necessary. The key points, which Christian duly despatched to Vienna, were that the ban

on Friedrich was to be withdrawn and his Palatine lands were to be restored to him, the rights and religious freedom of the Bohemians were likewise to be restored, and the Imperial and League armies were to be demobilised. The threat was viewed seriously by the emperor and his councillors, but it was not long before both they and Christian himself began to realise that the will to back it up was lacking. The north-German princes were not prepared to take the risk, James I was anxious not to imperil his efforts to arrange a Spanish marriage for his son, and the Dutch were increasingly preoccupied with the resumption of their war with Spain, while even Christian's own council would not agree to raising the necessary troops.¹²

Meanwhile with the truce coming to an end it was in the Dutch interest for Spanish forces to remain embroiled in Germany, so in February 1621 Friedrich was able to beg and borrow enough money to re-engage Mansfeld, then still securely fortified with his men in Pilsen. Although he had long been unpaid and had been inactive during the last stage of the revolt, the general had earlier managed to acquire many of the Palatine and privately recruited troop units which had made their way to Bohemia from the west, so that by this time he had a considerable army, which he had also protected from attack after the defeat of the revolt by agreeing a six-week truce with Tilly in January.¹³ He was able to supplement his numbers further by recruiting men from the remnants of the Bohemian army, and after he was forced out of Pilsen at the end of March he broke through into the Upper Palatinate in May, where he was followed and confronted by Imperialist units and part of the League army under Tilly's command. Both sides were cautious, digging themselves into fortified positions and skirmishing for the next four months while Maximilian delayed, seeking to increase the pressure on Ferdinand as they haggled over Friedrich's property. When the duke finally sent reinforcements in mid-September the resourceful Mansfeld, better at tactics than pitched battles, slipped away with his army under cover of darkness to begin a forced march across Germany, reaching the Rhine and the Lower Palatinate two weeks later, although he lost many men on the way. This was a military failure for Tilly, but it was a political success for Maximilian, who thus occupied the Upper Palatinate and secured control of one part of Friedrich's territories.

On the other hand the episode also delayed Maximilian's intended seizure of the part of the Lower Palatinate east of the Rhine, where he planned to forestall any possible Spanish move to extend their area of control. Tilly's army too now hurried westwards, ostensibly pursuing Mansfeld, who moved on into Alsace, but actually aiming at the

Palatinate. By then it was late in the year, and the armies were severely depleted by campaigning, epidemics and desertion, so that although Tilly occupied much of the territory he was unable to take the principal fortified cities of Heidelberg and Mannheim, while across the Rhine the fortress of Frankenthal continued to hold out as the last point of resistance to the Spanish occupiers. Thus the conquest of the Palatinate could not be completed in 1621, and there was scope for new contenders to take the field when campaigning resumed in the spring of 1622.

Bethlen Gabor again

The war during the first two and a half years, 1618 to 1620, had been essentially confined to the territory between Prague and Vienna, principally southern Bohemia and Lower Austria, although overlapping at times into Moravia and Upper Austria. Apart from the late invasion of the western Palatinate the only significant exception arose from the involvement of Bethlen Gabor, but this took the war east into Hungary rather than west into Germany. Bethlen's participation had nothing to do with the supposed causes of war in Germany, as secularised church lands were not an issue for him and he was not a member of the Imperial Reichstag, while neither his own lands nor any of those to which he seriously aspired lay within the Empire. Instead his issue was with Habsburg overlordship of Hungary, where his ambition was to carve out as much of their territory as possible for himself, and perhaps even to secure the crown. In this he was following in the footsteps of his Transylvanian predecessor Stefan Bocskay in the first decade of the century, while his own successor Georg Rákóczi did the same in the following decades. Whatever personal or religious sympathies the Calvinist Bethlen may have had with the Bohemians, the main basis of his affiliation was that 'my enemy's enemy is my friend', and he was equally ready to ally himself with the Muslim Ottomans. Hence he and his successor joined the anti-Habsburg party whenever it suited them during the Thirty Years War, and when it did not they abandoned their allies and made peace with the emperor until the next time. Bethlen's problem was that he was not strong enough to succeed against the Habsburgs on his own, so that he could only realistically pursue his ambitions when they already faced another opponent. He also needed an ally for the practical military reason that his armies were predominantly light cavalry, which he could raise in large numbers, although many of them only for a few months after the harvest each year, but he lacked the infantry and artillery necessary to capture cities or fortified positions.

Bethlen was one of the principal reasons why the war did not come to an end following the Bohemian collapse at the battle of the White Mountain, because as long as he was actually or potentially in the field he provided the encouragement of a prospective ally on a second front to others who wished to continue fighting. The concept of a two-pronged attack on Vienna and the Austrian heartland, with Bethlen coming from the east through Hungary and another anti-Habsburg force coming from the west through Bohemia or Moravia, had a long life and was several times resurrected, starting with Thurn in 1619 and ending with Mansfeld and Christian IV of Denmark in 1626.¹⁴ There was a plan for such a joint attack in 1623 after new protagonists of the Palatine cause emerged in Germany, while Friedrich's re-engagement of Mansfeld in February 1621 was made in the expectation that with Bethlen remaining in contention and looking to defend what he had so far gained the Habsburg side would have to split its forces during the following campaign.

As was his wont, Bethlen spent the winter of early 1621 both negotiating and preparing to fight. Ferdinand was willing to confirm his earlier territorial concessions, but not to agree to Bethlen's further conditions, particularly his retention of the Hungarian crown and the inclusion of the defeated Bohemians in a settlement.¹⁵ Bethlen's latter stipulation can be viewed charitably as loyalty to his former allies, or sceptically as an intentionally unacceptable proposal designed only to prolong discussions, but either way no agreement resulted. When fighting began again in early May 1621 Bucquoy's Imperialist army initially had the better of it, recapturing Pressburg and neighbouring territory in western Hungary (modern Slovakia), before laying siege to the fortress at Neuhäusel (Nové Zámky), which had been held by Bethlen's garrison since 1619. The defences were too strong, so that when after seven weeks the advance guard of Bethlen's army arrived the Imperialists found themselves in the classic trap, the besiegers besieged. To make matters worse Bucquoy himself was killed leading a sally, and his deputy abandoned the position in mid-July as Bethlen's main force approached, losing a large number of his men and his heavy artillery before reaching a safer refuge.

The margrave of Jägerndorf, the commander of the Silesian forces, was another who was encouraged to fight on by Bethlen's continuing participation in the anti-Habsburg front. Jägerndorf and his men had held out over the winter, even after the Silesian Estates had submitted to Johann Georg of Saxony, as a result of which Ferdinand placed him under the Imperial ban. Perversely, this removed any incentive for Jägerndorf to surrender, and he also received reinforcements from the

bolder spirits among the Bohemian exiles and the remains of their army before he moved to join Bethlen. Despite their large combined forces the fighting during the remainder of the year was inconclusive, as the Imperialists too regrouped, and by the late autumn Bethlen faced his perennial problem that many of his men wanted to go home before the winter. He had as usual begun negotiating well in advance, almost as soon as his success at Neuhäusel had strengthened his hand, and as Ferdinand was anxious for a settlement Bethlen was able to drive a hard bargain. He was ready to forego the Hungarian crown, but in return he received even larger territorial concessions, together with confirmation of Hungarian religious privileges and recognition of Transylvanian independence. Jägerndorf was left to fend for himself, but without money to pay his men most of them deserted and his resistance fizzled out, although he himself escaped.¹⁶

The eternal opportunist, Bethlen did not respect the peace treaty for long, and by the spring of 1623 he was again planning a large-scale attack, for which he enlisted unofficial support from the Ottoman sultan against an undertaking that captured Habsburg territories would become Turkish tributaries. He was also to be joined by a force of Bohemian exiles lead by Thurn, while the new Palatine supporters in Germany were to launch a simultaneous attack through Bohemia. In the event the latter were defeated by Tilly before they could set out, while Bethlen's own advance was delayed waiting for his full complement to report for service after bringing in the harvest. Hence he proceeded later and more cautiously than he had originally intended, but still with a reported 40,000 to 50,000 men, as before mainly light cavalry, although these numbers are even more suspect than the usually unreliable figures quoted for armies in this period.¹⁷ The Imperialist forces were by this time reduced in numbers, over-stretched and ill-organised, so that only a relatively small army could be mustered to oppose Bethlen, who however preferred to raid and skirmish rather than to seek a pitched battle, while the emperor's commanders sought to block his route to Vienna. Eventually he trapped the Imperialists in the small fortified town of Göding (Hodonin), sixty miles north of the city, where he mounted a siege instead of pressing on. As he had little infantry or artillery it became a long-drawn-out affair, but Bethlen was nearer to success than he knew when the approach of winter caused him to negotiate yet another truce and withdraw. A formal peace followed in May 1624, essentially confirming the terms of the previous one, but only two years later Bethlen was back on the attack in conjunction with Christian IV of Denmark.

The war in Germany

The development of the war in Germany during 1622 and 1623 was complicated, and its course is fully described by Wilson, but for present purposes the main interest is not in the military action, which will be outlined only briefly, but in who joined in the fighting, and why.¹⁸

Two powers whose participation was more limited than might have been anticipated were the Spanish and the Dutch. Contemporaries had expected that the ending of the truce in 1621 would lead not only to a resumption of the war in the Netherlands, but to its extension into a major European conflict, and some historians have explicitly or implicitly incorporated this into their view of the Thirty Years War. In the event the two wars proceeded mainly independently and in parallel, although they inevitably spilled over the boundaries from time to time, while on occasion the respective belligerents helped or were helped by the corresponding side in the Empire. Nevertheless, as Wilson observes, 'like the [Dutch] Republic, Spain had no intention of becoming involved in Germany and increasingly regarded the war there as a serious distraction. . . . Both Madrid and Brussels sought rapid disengagement in order to concentrate on the struggle against the Dutch.' He adds that 'the void was filled by new champions for whom the Palatine cause became an honourable cloak for a variety of more personal ambitions'.¹⁹

On an individual level many of the German noblemen who became involved in the war at around this time, some a little earlier, some a little later, were younger sons, for whom the church or the military were traditional occupations in the absence of a worthwhile inheritance. Opportunities in the church were limited, and even army commissions were not always available, particularly after the ending of the Long Turkish War in 1606 and the truce in the Netherlands from 1609, so that many young men were eager to sign on as the conflict in the Empire developed. The extent to which they were influenced by religion or politics obviously varied, but it is probably true to say of most that they joined up not for these reasons but in pursuit of personal advantage, although such considerations may well have influenced which side they chose to serve.

The range of differing approaches is well exemplified by four Sachsen-Lauenburg brothers, all younger sons of the previous ruling duke. The family was Lutheran, and the eldest of the four, Franz Julius, married a sister of the duke of Württemberg, a leading figure in the Protestant Union, but even so he entered Imperial service, although as a courtier

rather than as a soldier, and he later carried out a number of important diplomatic missions for Emperor Ferdinand II.

The second younger brother, Heinrich Julius, converted to Catholicism in his youth, apparently in the hope of gaining a bishopric, but in the event he too entered Imperial service, in his case in the army, fighting at the battle of the White Mountain and eventually reaching the rank of field marshal. Nevertheless in 1628, in the middle of this career, he married a daughter of the previous Lutheran elector of Brandenburg, and their son, a future ruling duke of Sachsen-Lauenburg, was brought up as a Protestant.

The third brother, Franz Karl, also fought in Bohemia, but on the other side under Mansfeld, and he later raised a regiment for Christian IV of Denmark, but after the latter's defeat he enlisted in Wallenstein's Imperialist army. When the Protestant Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden entered the war Franz Karl changed sides again to join him, staying with the Protestants after the latter's death but moving to the Saxon army, before eventually converting to Catholicism and rejoining the Imperialists as a general.

The youngest of the brothers, Franz Albrecht, joined the Imperial army and served for many years, five of them under Wallenstein, despite being a Protestant, before switching to Swedish service, where he was in Gustavus Adolphus's immediate entourage when the latter was killed at the battle of Lützen. He then became second-in-command of Elector Johann Georg's Saxon army, until he was taken prisoner by the Imperialists at the time of Wallenstein's assassination, but after a relatively short time he re-enlisted with his captors, continuing to serve the emperor until his death in action almost ten years later.

In contrast three other younger sons, the brothers of the ruling duke of Sachsen-Weimar, all became soldiers but remained Protestant and stayed firmly in the anti-Habsburg camp, although Bernhard, the youngest and most famous of them, eventually took his private army into the service of Catholic France and was involved in a number of attempts to secure a principality for himself, before falling ill and dying on campaign. In Mansfeld's case the lack of an inheritance likewise led him into a career as a soldier of fortune, and although he was brought up a Catholic and first enlisted with the emperor he then went over to the Protestant Union, before going on to serve in turn the Catholic duke of Savoy, the Protestant Bohemians, the Calvinist Friedrich of the Palatinate, and the Lutheran Christian IV of Denmark.

The significant thing about younger sons was that they had relatively little to lose, whereas ruling princes and their prospective heirs,

with their territories potentially at risk, were much more wary about open involvement in the conflict. On the other hand younger sons did not have the resources to raise armies, and their opportunities for military employment depended on others being willing and able to do so. By the end of 1621 the prospects on the anti-Habsburg side seemed slim. Bethlen Gabor had made peace with the emperor, at least for the time being, and Jägerndorf's unpaid army was fading away, so that Ferdinand's forces were no longer under immediate pressure in the east, although the ever-present Turkish threat precluded their full transfer to Germany. There, after the demise of the Union, only Mansfeld was still in contention, and he was licking his wounds after his narrow escape from the Upper Palatinate. How long the Dutch would continue to provide Friedrich with the money to pay him was doubtful, and it was even more doubtful whether on his own he would be a match for Tilly and the full League army in the following spring. By then, however, two new 'champions' had attached themselves to the Palatine cause, although, as Wilson suggests, with decidedly mixed motives.

The first to declare himself was yet another younger son, in this case Christian, brother of the ruling duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, although he had been fortunate to secure a personal domain as the Lutheran administrator of the secularised bishopric of Halberstadt at the age of seventeen. Nevertheless he had little enthusiasm for a religious or administrative career, and two years later, in December 1618, he gained his first military post when his brother appointed him as a Brunswick colonel, but this was a well-paid sinecure unless it actually became necessary to recruit troops. Then in March 1619 the Bohemian Estates offered him a commission to raise a regiment for their service, but again this would have been a purely nominal appointment to which he was expected to contribute only his name, money and credit-worthiness, without the authority even to appoint the officers. Christian apparently did make some initial moves towards gathering men and equipment, but he soon declined to proceed further, complaining that he had not been given any assurance of repayment of his initial outlay, and adding that he was in any case going to take service elsewhere. This was in Holland, where he had relatives in the influential Nassau family, but the truce with Spain still had two years to run. Hence although he was a captain in a dragoon regiment for a time he can have seen little action, apart from taking part in the largely bloodless and correspondingly unsuccessful Dutch foray to support the Union army in the Lower Palatinate in late 1620.²⁰

In spring 1621, back home and still aged only 21, Christian volunteered to raise an army for Friedrich and his Dutch paymasters, although for reasons which seem to have been primarily personal. He was certainly firmly Protestant, although more to the point ostentatiously anti-Catholic, but he was probably more attracted by the opportunity to make a name for himself as a general. Several disastrous years later he wrote apologetically to his mother: 'As for having a passion for war, I must confess that I do, that I was born with it, and that I shall have it to my dying day.'²¹ His behaviour confirms the truth of that statement, and his self-image is indicated by his conduct when his arm was badly wounded in the Netherlands in 1622. He reportedly had the amputation accompanied by a fanfare of trumpets, and he then despatched a messenger to tell the Spanish general Spinola that although he had lost one arm he still had a second, following this up by striking himself a medal with the motto *altera restat*, 'the other remains'.²²

Christian himself offered two explanations for his involvement, writing to his uncle, King Christian IV of Denmark, in early 1622 that he 'wanted to undertake knightly service on behalf of the king of Bohemia, and to show myself as a young cavalier', but later telling his mother, in the letter quoted above, 'that it was for no other reason than the great affection which I had for the queen of Bohemia'.²³ This was Friedrich's wife Elizabeth, who was the daughter of James I of England and also Christian's cousin, as their mothers were both sisters of the king of Denmark. The 'great affection' was ostensibly chivalrous rather than amorous, and it is said that Christian wore one of Elizabeth's gloves in his hat as though at a medieval joust while riding out on campaign under a banner inscribed 'For God and for her'. True or not, the glove story was reported in the near-contemporary German press and many times subsequently, while the English press noted that 'Count Mansfelt . . . with the Duke of Brunswick . . . have a considerable army on foot for the Lady Elizabeth . . . the Queen of Boheme, who is called for her winning Princely comportment the Queen of Hearts'. Elizabeth herself wrote to a friend that 'a worthie cosen germain of mine, the duc Cristian of Brunswic . . . hath ingaged himself onelie for my sake in our quarell'.²⁴ Less chivalrous are reports of Christian's obscene and scatological outbursts about various of his *bêtes noires* among the princes of the day, including James I, among the mildest being his description of the Archduchess Isabella as an old hag.²⁵ Contemporaries labelled Christian 'the mad Halberstädter', and it is not difficult to see why.

Whether Christian had any serious religious, political or personal aims beneath this cloak of romantic fantasy can only be guessed, as there

are few indications. He was from north Germany, a region which was principally Lutheran, and where not only his own but almost all the ruling dynasties other than Brandenburg had resisted the efforts of the Protestant Union to recruit them. During the religious and political disputes earlier in the century his family had been far more inclined to the moderate group led by Saxony than to the militant line espoused by the Palatinate and its Calvinist supporters. Christian's father, although a Lutheran and the ruling duke, nevertheless made a career in the service of Emperor Rudolf II in Prague, where he became director of the privy council, and after his death in 1613 his wife, Christian's mother, reportedly assured Johann Georg that Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel 'would not diverge by so much as a finger's breadth from the political maxims of Saxony, and above all not from the sworn opposition to the Union'.²⁶

For Christian himself there is only the negative information that there is no record of any particular political interest or activity during the four years in which he had already been administrator of the bishopric. Nor was his position there under any apparent threat, as Halberstadt was covered by the guarantee given in the Mühlhausen declaration of March 1620, that the Catholic party would not try to recover such secularised properties by force. Christian may possibly have had territorial designs on the nearby bishopric of Paderborn, and it is noteworthy that one of his first military exploits was to raid it, thereby supplementing the limited resources of his own lands, together with money loaned to him by his mother and the funds advanced by the Dutch, in order to finance his army. Eccentric though he was, by late 1621 he had a significant force in service, albeit the number of men was more impressive than their quality and experience as soldiers, or than their organisation, discipline and weaponry.

Margrave Georg Friedrich of Baden-Durlach was an entirely different character. Approaching fifty and with some twenty years' experience as a ruling prince, he had been one of the most committed members of the Protestant Union, as well as of a forerunner alliance for mutual defence formed with Württemberg and Pfalz-Neuburg in 1605. Less cautious than his neighbour, the duke of the larger and richer Württemberg, he was also one of the very few Union members to support Friedrich's acceptance of the Bohemian crown, and this, together with his own fervent Protestant, albeit Lutheran, faith, made him one of the more likely continuing adherents to the Palatine cause. Even so he had more personal considerations, foremost among them the Spanish army of occupation in the Palatinate, virtually on his doorstep, and the possibility that if he remained unarmed and undefended after the demise of

the Union the fighting in the latter territory might spill over into his own domains.

More personal still was the threat of being deprived of part of his lands. Back in 1594 his family's Catholic relatives ruling Baden-Baden had become so over-indebted that Emperor Rudolf II had threatened an Imperial intervention, which Georg's own brother and predecessor had forestalled by occupying and taking over their territory. This *de facto* amalgamation had never been formally recognised within the Empire, the relatives were trying to recover their lands, and the matter had already been before the Imperial courts for ten years when Georg became the ruling duke.²⁷ Although he secured an administrative lien on the territory from Rudolf II in 1605 this was only against an undertaking to transfer it to the claimants should the court find in their favour, as well as not to interfere with the Catholic religion of the inhabitants in the meantime. The Hofrat did indeed find in their favour, but Georg sought every possible means to dispute and delay the judgement, as well as repeatedly trying to enlist the support of the Union with the claim that this was an issue of general concern for the Protestants. Long-drawn-out negotiations for a settlement collapsed in 1617, but Georg continued further legal manoeuvres, including challenging the competence of the court in the matter. By 1621 the possibilities were exhausted, and feeling himself defenceless after the collapse of the Union in April of that year Georg started to build up his own army and to establish contacts with Mansfeld. In December 1621 the emperor dismissed his final appeal, and on 22 April 1622 he abdicated in favour of his son to protect his duchy from sequestration, before taking the field against Tilly with a small army, half of which was formed from local militia, while most of the more professional units were recently recruited, probably including many soldiers from the disbanded Union army.²⁸

One other Protestant prince took up arms, but entirely on his own behalf rather than even nominally in support of 'Winter King' Friedrich, and although politically irrelevant at the time this is worth mentioning as a further illustration of the personal motives which underlay many princely involvements in the Thirty Years War. Landgrave Moritz of Hessen-Kassel had seized the city of Marburg and its environs from his Hessen-Darmstadt relations in 1604, resulting in a feud which was still running and which ran for many years subsequently. Both sides were Lutheran, but whereas Moritz joined the Protestant Union his opponent Ludwig V of Darmstadt aligned himself with the Imperialists, rallying support for them, carefully cultivating first Rudolf's and then Ferdinand's favour, and biding his time. Moritz retained a small

but useful number of professional soldiers, supported by a large militia, and in 1621 he decided to take advantage of the focus of attention on the Palatine question to invade and seize the neighbouring county of Waldeck, also Lutheran, of which he claimed overlordship. The count was well connected and Moritz quickly found himself isolated even among the Protestants, a Hofrat judgement against him followed, and he abandoned Waldeck early in the following year. That was not the end, however, as a further judgement followed, this time awarding Marburg to Ludwig, and as soon as Tilly could spare troops in 1623 he moved against Moritz to enforce the restitution.²⁹

By the spring of 1622 there were five armies involved in the main conflict in Germany, Tilly's League army and the remaining Spanish occupying force commanded by Córdoba on the Imperialist side, and Mansfeld, Christian of Brunswick and Georg of Baden-Durlach on behalf of Friedrich of the Palatinate. None, however, were fighting about the issues which had caused so much inter-confessional tension in the Empire in the pre-war years.

The Palatinate had been at the forefront in the earlier confrontations in the Reichstag and over the Imperial courts, but Friedrich had taken up arms not for these reasons, but because his acceptance of the Bohemian crown made him a party to the war which was already under way as a result of the revolt. By 1622 his objective had narrowed to recovering his original possessions, and most of the limited financial support he received from abroad, including from his relatives James I of England and Christian IV of Denmark, was likewise intended purely for this purpose. His Dutch backers had their own concerns, and their assistance was designed mainly to keep the conflict going in Germany in order to tie down the Spanish forces, and to prevent them from being returned to the war in the Netherlands.

Mansfeld was by this stage essentially a mercenary. Emperor Matthias had placed him under the Imperial ban at an early stage of the war in Bohemia, thus ensuring that he had to go on fighting as much for his own self-preservation as for any other reason. His army was his only principality, so that he had to find employment and pay for it wherever he could, and although he was firmly anti-Habsburg there is no indication that he was concerned about wider political issues. Christian of Brunswick was eccentric and enigmatic, but it seems more logical to take his self-confessed and essentially non-political motivations at face value, rather than postulating a new-found enthusiasm for the old concerns. Only for Georg of Baden-Durlach may these have retained a lingering significance, but it would be surprising if he alone of the

principal members of the Union had felt strongly enough about them to raise an army and take it into battle, had he not also had significant territorial and personal interests to protect. It is worth adding that none of the property issues previously mentioned, Baden-Baden, Marburg or Waldeck, concerned secularised church lands.

The pre-war disputes were certainly a factor in the League's original decision to raise an army, as they were in the Union's parallel action, but for both sides the motivation was specifically defensive, in case the other should take advantage of the instability created by the war in Bohemia to initiate some form of attack. The League as a whole, and all but a very few of its individual members, had no intention of going on the offensive, and that remained the case even after the defeat of the revolt. The League involvement in that campaign had been justified as a duty to support the emperor, a duty which had conveniently coincided with Maximilian's personal interests. By 1622 Maximilian was the League's dominant personality, its military commander, and its principal paymaster, to the extent that the League army increasingly resembled his private army, and commentators both at the time and since have often referred to it loosely as the Bavarian army, and to Tilly as the Bavarian general. The League army's initial move into Germany in 1621 was intended solely to capture and occupy the remainder of the Palatinate, ostensibly as an enforcement of the Imperial ban on Friedrich, but equally certainly with the intention of securing Maximilian's own prospective interest in the territory. The intervention of Christian of Brunswick and Georg of Baden-Durlach, added to Mansfeld's continuing involvement, meant that the League army had to fight for the next two years, but this stemmed originally from the Bohemian revolt and Friedrich's participation in it, rather than being in pursuit of objectives deriving from the earlier inter-confessional dissension in the Empire.

Spain had at first been very reluctant to become involved in the campaign against the Bohemians, but had been persuaded that the revolt presented not only a wider threat to Habsburg interests but also a potentially serious diversion from the war then shortly to be resumed in the Netherlands. Thus they had sent a modest number of troops from Italy to Bohemia, and had also eventually been induced to support Maximilian's invasion by the diversionary attack on the Palatinate. Nevertheless the Spanish too had interests of their own, principally strategic. A French resurgence posed a threat to the overland route to supply the Spanish Netherlands from Italy, both via the original Spanish Road close to French borders and by the newer alternative route through the

Valtelline (see Chapter 1). The latter led eventually to the Rhine, and the Lower Palatinate straddled and controlled an important section of this river, so that a pre-emptive occupation by Spain would secure the route in advance of the resumption of their war with the Dutch. Hence the Spanish did not intend withdraw completely, but the force they had left behind was mainly required to secure the territory, particularly in view of the continuing resistance at Frankenthal.³⁰ This limited the assistance they were able to provide to Tilly in 1622, although some of their units returning from Bohemia also joined him.

Had Mansfeld, Christian of Brunswick and Georg of Baden-Durlach been able to bring their armies together, had the quality and equipment of their forces matched their numbers, and had they been well commanded, they might have been more than a match for Tilly's League army, but none of these requirements was met. Mansfeld was a better recruiter and organiser than a field commander, Christian, although well provided with native wit and raw courage, was a young romantic rather than a trained officer, and Georg had studied military theory but had no practical experience.³¹ Tilly, on the other hand, was the ultimate professional and one of the most successful generals of the age, his army was well equipped, and it had a battle-hardened core from the Bohemian campaign. Christian's army was in northern Germany while Georg of Baden-Durlach and Mansfeld were in the south, although separately, and it was evident to Tilly that he had to find, fight and defeat them individually before they could join up against him.

Encouraged by the emergence of his new supporters, Friedrich himself accompanied Mansfeld, who moved his army west into the Palatinate early in 1622, crossing the Rhine and encountering Tilly with a smaller force but in a strong defensive position at Wiesloch, ten miles south of Heidelberg. Mansfeld withdrew, hoping that Georg of Baden-Durlach would soon join him, but Tilly followed, attacking from the rear on 27 April as Mansfeld's troops crossed a small river. The subsequent fighting was indecisive, although the League army suffered considerable losses, while Tilly himself was wounded and narrowly escaped capture.³² Both sides then retired to a safe distance, where Tilly was reinforced by Córdoba but his opponents' strength was increased much more by the arrival of Georg and his Baden army. The Palatine side then unwisely sacrificed their numerical superiority as Mansfeld split off to besiege a small Spanish-held town, giving Tilly the chance to attack Georg at Wimpfen, near Heilbronn, on 6 May. The resulting battle was fiercely fought and long drawn out, but the outcome was a decisive victory for

Tilly, while the Baden army was virtually destroyed, and little more than a quarter of the men eventually rejoined Mansfeld.

Meanwhile Christian of Brunswick had been making his way south slowly, experiencing some difficulty in crossing hostile territory. Tilly took the opportunity to concentrate all his available forces into one of the largest armies which had so far been involved, so that even though Mansfeld despatched a sizeable part of his own force to join Christian the latter was outnumbered by around two to one. Tilly caught up with him at Höchst, just west of Frankfurt am Main, attacking him at another river crossing on 20 June and putting his army to flight with heavy losses. Christian managed to join up with Mansfeld's main force, and together they escaped Tilly's pursuit, although with further losses, and after re-grouping they headed north east, aiming to reach Dutch territory. Córdoba intercepted them near Namur in late August, leading to another battle at Fleurus, but eventually Mansfeld and Christian succeeded in breaking away, claiming victory despite yet further losses of men and equipment, so that it was with a very much reduced and battle-scarred force that they eventually reached their destination.

Both generals had in fact already been dismissed by Friedrich, a move intended as a conciliatory gesture towards his opponents and a response to the urgings of his father-in-law James I, as the defeats of the summer had undermined his resolution and he was for the first time prepared to consider negotiation. Georg of Baden-Durlach, even more disillusioned, had discharged the remains of his army in late June and petitioned the emperor for a pardon. The conquest of the Palatinate was completed in the following months, when Tilly finally captured Heidelberg in September and Mannheim surrendered at the beginning of November. The fortress of Frankenthal held out over the winter, but it too was surrendered by its mainly English defenders in March 1623, on the orders of James I, who hoped that this would assist peace negotiations.

In the event little progress was made in agreeing peace terms, and in the meantime Friedrich recovered his determination to continue the struggle. Mansfeld and Christian of Brunswick entered Dutch service briefly in the autumn of 1622, and they were able to rebuild and re-equip their forces over the winter. Hence they intended to take part in the joint campaign with Bethlen Gabor in 1623 mentioned above, but once again the two generals failed to unite their armies, and Tilly intercepted Christian in north Germany before the march eastwards began. Christian attempted to retreat back towards Holland, but eventually Tilly forced him to battle at Stadtlohn, on the border west of Münster, effectively destroying his army on 6 August although Christian

himself escaped. Maximilian refused to allow a pursuit into Dutch territory, as the League was as anxious to avoid entanglement in the war in the Netherlands as the Spanish and the Dutch were to limit their involvement in Germany.³³

During this campaign Mansfeld had remained on the defensive in a strong position in Ostfriesland, on the Dutch border in north-west Germany. Tilly did not have sufficient resources to mount an attack after his own losses over the summer, so instead the two armies settled into winter quarters in the region, but in January 1624 the local Estates, anxious to be rid of the troops, offered Mansfeld enough money to pay off his men, most of whom promptly re-enlisted with the Dutch. Mansfeld himself slipped away too, but before the year was out he had recruited a new army with James I of England's money, for service in the next phase of the war.

Into the Thirty Years War

Ultimately more significant than these last military campaigns of the Palatine struggle were the political developments and international manoeuvrings which were taking place at the same time. Paradoxically, Tilly's military triumphs soon began to work against the position of the Catholic party, as with each successive victory concerns mounted further, both in the Empire and abroad, about the prospect of a powerful Imperialist and League army establishing dominance in Germany. Moreover with the campaigning moving into Westphalia and Ostfriesland during 1623, Tilly was no longer far away in the south, but on the doorstep of the north-German Protestant princes, the Dutch, and King Christian IV of Denmark.

Friedrich also attracted more sympathy the worse his situation became. Few princes, even in the Protestant Union, had looked favourably on his Bohemian adventure, but they had not anticipated that he would be totally dispossessed by way of punishment. Applying the Imperial ban to a renegade minor nobleman such as Mansfeld was one thing, but to do so to the senior secular elector of the Holy Roman Empire seemed to them to be quite another. Even Charles V, three-quarters of a century before, had not stripped the Schmalkalden rebels of all their territories, and for Ferdinand to proceed so far against Friedrich would set a precedent which made even Catholic princes uncomfortable. Maximilian's designs on Friedrich's lands were also rather obvious, while there had been speculation about a possible transfer of the electoral title from an early stage, as the English ambassador in Prague

reported only ten days after the battle of the White Mountain: 'It is conceived that that [the Upper Palatinate] with the electorate shall be the rewarde of his service.'³⁴

In early 1621, with Upper Austria in his hands, Maximilian had adequate security for his expenses and he could afford to wait for an eventual territorial settlement in lieu. However he was equally keen to secure the electoral title but he had no corresponding hold over Ferdinand about the transfer, and he was anxious in case political pressures on the latter caused him to go back on their secret agreement. A more political emperor than Ferdinand might well have done so, pleading reasons of state, but he probably had both religious and personal scruples about breaking his word to a Catholic prince and kinsman. Moreover the transfer, could it be accomplished, was ultimately in his own family interest as a means of consolidating the Catholic, and hence Habsburg, hold on the Imperial crown, a point which he himself made to the Spanish first minister Zúñiga.³⁵ In any case he could not afford to offend Maximilian as long as Friedrich's supporters were still in arms and he needed the League army for his own defence.

As soon as the war in Bohemia had been won Maximilian began pressing Ferdinand privately to honour his promise, while the latter prevaricated, delaying action because of political opposition but also seeking to use the prospective transfer as a bargaining counter to recover his own territory from the Bavarian. In February 1621 Imperial emissaries attempted to persuade Maximilian to accept other securities, including the property of rebels in Upper Austria, rather than the territory itself, as a guarantee for his expenses, but he declined firmly. In March 1621 the president of the Imperial privy council was sent to Munich to confirm Ferdinand's intention of transferring the title, but seeking to impose new conditions. Maximilian was to conquer the Upper Palatinate in pursuit of an Imperial mandate, but at his own expense, and once he had done so he was to keep it as his security and to return Upper Austria. Moreover he was then to make a significant cash payment to Ferdinand, in whose view the Upper Palatinate was worth more than Maximilian's total expenses, and further he was to make no claim to the Lower Palatinate, which was instead to be offered to Archduke Albrecht in return for his assistance and expenses.³⁶

Maximilian indignantly rejected these retrospective stipulations, complaining that the original promise was given 'without any condition, limitation, restriction or exception'. He also argued that the Golden Bull made an explicit link between the lands of the Lower Palatinate and the electoral title, so that as the latter had been promised

to him it must also be accompanied by the former, without which the validity of the transfer would be open to challenge, and he added force to his objections by pointedly delaying his advance into the Upper Palatinate. The resulting wrangling went on for a further year, as Maximilian refused to give way, while Ferdinand wanted to secure concessions 'before he let the trump card of the electoral transfer out of his hand'.³⁷

The delay provided scope for opposition to develop, not only from the expected quarters led by the elector of Saxony, who correctly predicted that a transfer of the electoral title would be a source of new conflict in the Empire, but also on the Catholic side. The elector of Mainz, supported by the elector of Trier, was strongly opposed, on the grounds that a transfer could prove an enduring obstacle to conciliation with the conservative and more pro-Imperial Protestant princes. The Spanish ambassador Oñate was also a leading and vocal opponent, fearing that such a provocative move could result in a new anti-Habsburg alliance in the Empire and in Europe, which England might join, a prospect which was particularly unwelcome to Spain in view of the recently resumed war in the Netherlands.³⁸ The arrival of James I's envoy in Vienna during July 1621 to intercede on behalf of Friedrich added force to this argument, and even in the emperor's own privy council most of the leading members were against proceeding with the transfer. The new pope Gregory XV was among the few who were firmly in favour, sending legates to Madrid and Vienna to lobby for the transfer, while the Jesuits, among them the confessors of some leading princes, likewise provided support.³⁹

Caught between his military dependence on Maximilian on the one side, and wide opposition to the transfer on the other, Ferdinand eventually opted for a middle way, so that on 22 September 1621 he issued the formal hereditary transfer secretly to Maximilian, with the condition that it would only be confirmed publicly once the consent of Spain and Saxony had been secured. Knowledge of this was confined on the Imperial side to two principal councillors, together with the papal representative and Ferdinand's confessor, and on Maximilian's to a few confidantes, while the matter was handled so secretly that Stralendorf, the vice-president of the Imperial privy council, himself wrote out the lengthy document, foregoing the usual use of parchment and the great seal. Although the pope's agent was a strong advocate of this stratagem, Maximilian himself may well have suggested it as a means to commit Ferdinand irrevocably to the transfer, while the latter's anxiety to get Maximilian to move against the Upper Palatinate was probably also significant.⁴⁰

The move did not stay secret for long, as only a few weeks later a consignment of letters from Ferdinand and the papal nuncio in Vienna to their opposite numbers in Madrid was captured by Mansfeld's troops. These documents were passed on to Friedrich, who promptly spread the news of their contents, while they were published in full the following spring, and hence both Ferdinand's original promise and his secret transfer of the electoral title to Maximilian were revealed. Opposition continued nevertheless throughout the following year, as did efforts to find a settlement, which were led by James I's representatives but frustrated on the one hand by Friedrich's refusal to agree to more than relinquishing the Bohemian crown and on the other by Maximilian's persistence with his claim to the Lower Palatinate. Maximilian was equally obdurate in rejecting Ferdinand's renewed attempt after the conquest of the Upper Palatinate to persuade him to accept that territory as surety in place of Upper Austria, pointing out that the former remained militarily vulnerable whereas the latter was relatively secure, although meanwhile he continued to hold both. He also maintained his efforts to find support for his claim to the electoral title, even attempting to win over Johann Georg by arguing that the political positions of Saxony and Bavaria were similar. Lutherans and Catholics had a common interest in opposing the Calvinists, he said, and they had lived together peaceably on the basis of the religious peace of Augsburg 'until the Calvinist spectre began to intrude its noxious seeds and weeds'.⁴¹

In the end it was not diplomacy but Tilly's military successes in mid-1622 at Wimpfen and Höchst, followed by the occupation of the whole of the Palatinate, together with the peace agreement with Bethlen Gabor earlier in that year, which persuaded Ferdinand to proceed with the confirmation of the electoral transfer, as the papal nuncio reported.⁴² Equally significant, however, was the fact that those victories were not total, with Mansfeld and Christian of Brunswick rebuilding their forces in Holland, so that Ferdinand could not fob Maximilian off indefinitely while remaining dependent on his League army.

The forum was a meeting of princes of the Empire which had been summoned for January 1623, although this, neither an electoral meeting nor a Reichstag, was intended not to decide on the question but merely to give public recognition to Ferdinand's transfer of the title on his own authority.

However the proposal immediately generated a hostile debate, led by the representatives of Saxony and Brandenburg. The two electors and virtually all other Protestant princes declined to attend in person, and their opposition was increased by the fact that in October 1622

Ferdinand, prompted by the papal nuncio, had ordered the expulsion of Protestant pastors and schoolteachers from Prague. Even the Catholic princes were less than enthusiastic in their support, and the elector of Mainz in particular remained opposed, eventually suggesting as a compromise that the transfer should be only to Maximilian personally, rather than hereditary, so that the claims of Friedrich's children, James I's grandchildren, should not be permanently prejudiced. Maximilian was reluctant, but after Ferdinand gave him yet another secret undertaking, promising that the transfer would be made hereditary as soon as circumstances permitted, he was persuaded that this offer should be accepted before further objections emerged.⁴³

The electors of Saxony and Brandenburg maintained their opposition, while the Spanish ambassador Oñate declined to attend the transfer ceremony and Archduchess Isabella of the Netherlands (Albrecht by then having died) registered a protest. At the same time Friedrich's Palatinate was sequestered and dismembered. The Spanish continued to occupy the western part of the Lower Palatinate, while small sections of the eastern part were awarded to neighbouring territories in settlement of various claims, but the remainder, together with the whole of the Upper Palatinate, went to Maximilian.

These actions fuelled growing international hostility. At one level this had a genuinely religious element, as all parts of the Protestant Palatinate thus came under Catholic government at a time when Ferdinand's militant approach to his re-conquered Bohemian territories was already causing great concern. The executions in Prague in May 1621 had been widely reported, and they were followed by extensive confiscations of Protestant property and the beginnings of a programme of recatholicisation. A wave of embittered emigrants spread tales of persecution far and wide, while Friedrich assumed the status of the most prominent exile, expelled from his territories and reduced to penury, so that his attractive wife and young children became dependent on Dutch charity. This image attracted particular sympathy in England, where James I's reluctance to provide active military support for his son-in-law was already deeply unpopular both in parliament and on the streets of London, but it also had echoes in the other Protestant countries of northern Europe.

At another level there were also significant geopolitical considerations. The effective elimination of the Palatinate, in conjunction with the collapse of the Protestant Union, the re-emergence of a much strengthened Catholic League, the triumph of the Habsburg emperor, and a substantial enhancement of the size and status of Bavaria, all

added up to a potential major shift in the balance of power in Europe. The leading countries had been used to a divided Empire, preoccupied with its internal disputes and unwilling or unable to exercise much influence in international affairs, so that Habsburg domination would create a new, and for some a threatening, situation, particularly in view of the Spanish connection.

The continuing Spanish occupation of the Lower Palatinate west of the Rhine gave emphasis to the latter point, and it was as unwelcome to France as it was to the Dutch. The old French obsession about being surrounded by Habsburg but more particularly by Spanish territory remained, and the Palatinate added one more link to the chain. Moreover the Palatinate had previously had close connections with France, notably during the time of Henri IV, so that Spanish presence in what had been a French sphere of influence was an affront as well as a threat. Political implications extended even to Scandinavia, not only because of the proximity of Tilly's army to the Danish borders in 1623, but also in relation to Gustavus Adolphus's continuing conflict with his cousin, the king of Poland. Catholic Poland was a natural ally of the Austrian Habsburgs, and had more than once assisted them against the Turks and Bethlen Gabor, so that the possibility of reciprocal help on the Baltic was a matter of concern for Sweden too.

Other, in principle unrelated, international political events also began to exercise an influence. As noted in Chapter 1, Spain had seized and occupied the Valtelline in 1620 in order to secure the route through the Alps from their Italian provinces into the Tyrol, which they needed as an alternative to the old Spanish Road. At the time the French had been too preoccupied with their internal problems to intervene, but by 1622 they were looking outwards once more, and they formed an alliance with Savoy and Venice which had several essentially anti-Habsburg objectives. One of these was to free the Valtelline on behalf of its rulers, the Swiss Graubünden, who had been allies of France and theoretically under its protection for the last twenty years. War was avoided for a time by Spanish acceptance of a face-saving withdrawal under papal auspices in early 1623, but the tension in northern Italy remained as a source of future conflict, while France later sought to add to Spanish problems by sending money and men by sea to reinforce Mansfeld on the Dutch border in Ostfriesland.⁴⁴

Also in early 1623, relations between Spain and England cooled sharply when James I's long-running attempt to establish a concord based on a marriage between his son Charles and a Spanish princess reached a breaking point. Confronted by Charles in person on a

romantic venture to Madrid in February 1623, the Spanish presented conditions which were not only unacceptable but almost certainly known to be so, and although diplomatic contacts continued for some months the terms were finally rejected by the English privy council in January 1624. On the one hand this removed one of James's main reasons for refraining from actively assisting Friedrich, and on the other it set in train a search for a French match for Charles instead. By the spring of 1624 France and England were discussing an alliance to intervene in Germany on behalf of Friedrich, although privately the French target was principally the ejection of Spain from the Palatinate, and in June the former French–Dutch alliance was re-established, with French subsidies once again supporting the latter's war against the Spanish.

Ultimately the French–English alliance came to nothing, as arch-Catholics in France forced an abrupt change of policy away from cooperation with Protestant powers, leading the new chief minister, Cardinal Richelieu, to turn attention back to Italy instead. The first result was a new clash with Spain in the Valtelline, which France occupied in the autumn of 1624, before going on to join Savoy in besieging Spain's ally Genoa in 1625. Although not immediately or directly relevant to the conflict in Germany, these developments marked a significant change in the international political climate, creating the conditions for a wider European involvement in the war in the Empire.

Although James I had censured Friedrich's involvement in Bohemia from the outset, he was by no means indifferent to his son-in-law's subsequent fate, and he had endeavoured to assist as far as possible within the constraints imposed by his efforts to strengthen links with Spain. Thus he had allowed recruitment in England on behalf of the Palatinate, so that some English troops fought in Bohemia and more defended the fortress of Frankenthal later, and he had also been instrumental in securing loans for Friedrich from Christian IV of Denmark. Nevertheless James's main aim had been to promote a peaceable settlement which would extricate Friedrich from Bohemia but allow him to recover and retain his own lands, an objective to which he had devoted considerable diplomatic effort. Ferdinand's sequestration and distribution of the Palatinate to his supporters finally persuaded James that more than diplomacy was required, so that in addition to his endeavours with France he also engaged Mansfeld to start recruiting a force on his behalf. However his own resources were limited, and other allies were needed before any effective action could be undertaken.

Assembling a suitable coalition was not an easy matter, as the failure of the Segeberg conference in 1621 had shown. Christian IV of

Denmark, although still concerned about what he regarded as the Habsburg threat, was deeply disillusioned after that setback, and a year later, in February 1622, he rebuffed a mission from the Palatine councillor Camerarius with another repetition of his advice to Friedrich to seek reconciliation with the emperor. There were also serious tensions between the prospective northern Protestant allies. Denmark and the United Provinces were commercial rivals, while the former had long maintained surprisingly good relations with Spain, which the Dutch viewed with deep suspicion. Danish tolls on shipping passing in and out of the Baltic through the Sound, and Dutch efforts to control the north German estuaries were significant issues, with the latter leading to a clash between warships of the two countries in the spring of 1623.⁴⁵ Moreover Denmark and Sweden were at daggers drawn, with open war between them more than once threatening to break out in the early 1620s. All of them regarded England as unreliable because of James I's vacillation between seeking support for Friedrich over the Palatinate and endeavouring not to upset the Spanish marriage negotiations, so that his change of policy after the latter collapsed met with considerable scepticism.

Denmark, which then included Norway and the southern part of modern Sweden, had traditionally been the dominant Scandinavian power, but growing Swedish ambitions had led to a war in 1611, resulting in a crushing Danish victory. As a result the young King Gustavus II Adolphus, who came to the Swedish throne in 1612, had inherited major problems and a massive reparations liability, but had amazed contemporaries by not only paying off the debts but coming off best in a war with Russia, before going on to attack Polish Livonia in 1617 and again in 1621 after a period of truce. His military talents and evident territorial ambitions not only made him an uncomfortable neighbour for Christian IV, but also made Gustavus himself potentially receptive to suggestions that he might both enhance his reputation and further his own interests by becoming the Protestant champion in Germany.

On a visit to Stockholm in November 1623 Camerarius was indeed able to elicit an agreement in principle from the king to intervene in Germany, but while various schemes were floated Gustavus's principal concerns remained Denmark and Poland. He had agreed a year's truce with the latter in July 1622, subsequently prolonged into 1624, despite which Sigismund III was busy preparing an invasion of the Swedish mainland, so that this war was no more than in abeyance.⁴⁶ At the same time Gustavus was threatening Denmark with war over various disputed issues as well as demanding exemption from the Sound toll for Swedish

shipping. Christian's intention of responding militarily was overruled by the Danish council (effectively the Estates), and in the resulting negotiations Denmark was forced in June 1624 to concede on almost all points, including the Sound dues, a humiliating defeat which had a bearing on Christian's subsequent attitude and actions.⁴⁷

In July 1624 James I, with Dutch support, sent a diplomatic mission to Copenhagen to seek Danish participation in joint action aimed at the restitution of the Palatinate and containment of Habsburg expansionism. Christian, who was proposed as leader of the campaign, was by this time ready to resume his involvement, but his council maintained the steadfast opposition which they had presented to all previous suggestions. Gustavus was also approached, but he refused not only to serve under Christian's leadership but even to take part in any venture in which Denmark was included. However he responded more favourably to a subsequent approach from England, the Dutch and the elector of Brandenburg, as in this case he was to be the leader, but he soon became more cautious and started to make conditions. He would not cooperate with Catholic France in the parallel Anglo-French plan which was still being proposed at that time, and he would need an army of 40,000 men, of which he was to have sole command although his allies were to provide two-thirds of the troops. Such a contribution was well beyond James I's resources, while the scale of the implied ambitions for the proposed intervention caused him considerable anxiety, so that he returned to vain efforts to secure Danish leadership and to persuade Gustavus to take part in rather than to control the venture.

With these plans going nowhere Christian developed an alternative of his own. He was not only king of Denmark but also duke of Holstein, a neighbouring but separate German territory which was part of the Empire rather than of Denmark, and which extended as far south as the free city of Hamburg and the River Elbe. As such he was also a prince of the Empire and a member of its Lower Saxon Circle, and while the Danish council could limit his actions in respect of Denmark they had no powers of constraint over him as duke of Holstein. His freedom in that capacity was further increased by the fact that he, like Maximilian of Bavaria, was one of the personally richest princes of the day, so that he was not dependent on the Estates, either of Denmark or of Holstein, for tax grants to finance his venture.

Christian had sought to involve the Lower Saxon Circle in action over the Palatinate at the Segeberg conference, but both then and since the members had proved disunited and disinclined to risk any significant participation. By late 1624, however, there was one new

issue which concerned them directly, namely the continued presence of Tilly's League army and his Spanish supporting troops. After defeating Christian of Brunswick at the battle of Stadtlohn in August 1623 Tilly had moved his army back into Westphalia and encamped it on the borders of the Lower Saxon Circle, where he rebuilt its strength while he kept watch on Mansfeld in Ostfriesland, and although Mansfeld dispersed his force and slipped away early in 1624 Tilly stayed put. There were of course good reasons for this. Mansfeld had fled into Holland once before, only to re-emerge six months later with a substantial reconstituted army, and he might have done so again. Moreover Ferdinand and Maximilian were well aware, at least in general terms, of the efforts being made to assemble a coalition to attack them, and as that threat lay in the north it was logical to keep the army there at the ready. It would in any case not have been welcome back on Catholic territory, as a stationary army imposed huge burdens on the land and population. Better to leave it in a Protestant area and ignore the complaints.

Complaints there certainly were, as the army effectively lived off the land, imposing billeting and financial contributions across a wide area of the Lower Saxon Circle, while it was also seen as a political threat by the princes. Hence by early 1625 they were ready to respond to Christian's proposals that they should arm themselves in order to force Tilly out, and the king himself began recruiting in Holstein. In order to validate his actions under Imperial law, however, he needed an official position, and as the office of *Kreisoberst*, the military commander of the Circle, was conveniently vacant he set out to gain it for himself. The problems he encountered again demonstrated the widespread reluctance to become involved in moves which could lead to war, and the process itself was reminiscent of what had previously happened within the Protestant Union. Christian took the precaution of calling a prior meeting of the princes to gain their support, although it took him two days of persuasion to do so, so that his actual election should have been a foregone conclusion, but instead when the full membership assembled in April 1625 opposition emerged, particularly from the cities. Hence they declined either to sanction military action or to elect Christian, choosing a nonentity in his place. However the latter refused the position, so that a further meeting was convened in May, at which Christian's appointment and the raising of forces were reluctantly agreed. Even then, though, any action was to be specifically defensive and within the confines of the Circle, so that there was no question or even mention of intervention in connection with the Palatinate.

Subsequent developments were even more disappointing for Christian. Although his own recruitment progressed rapidly most of the other members of the Circle were slow to move and fell well short of providing their quotas of troops, and while the two dukes of Mecklenburg, the largest territory, were keen participants their Estates were not and refused to fund any recruitment whatsoever.⁴⁸ Nor was the expected support from England and the Dutch forthcoming, the former sending only Mansfeld's small army but not the promised additional 7000 men. Nevertheless by the early summer Christian himself had 20,000 men in his Lower Saxon Circle army ready for deployment.

Why Christian entered the war is a question which has not been, and perhaps cannot be, satisfactorily answered, beyond noting that, as with his namesake Christian of Brunswick and with Margrave Georg Friedrich of Baden-Durlach, the main factors seem to have been either personal or his personal interpretation of the circumstances. His own northerly lands were the least affected by the presence of Tilly's army, but he nevertheless viewed supposed Habsburg aspirations to universal monarchy and the counter-Reformationary ambitions of Emperor Ferdinand II as significant and direct threats to Denmark, an opinion which his council consistently refuted and rejected whenever he put it to them. On a more personal note he was equally convinced that Ferdinand had ambitions to recover for Catholicism and as appanages for his offspring the secularised north German bishoprics into which Christian had succeeded in placing his own children. In principle he may well have been right about this, but the prospects at the time of Ferdinand achieving it were remote.

Christian was likewise worried by the threat from Sweden, and this met with a little more sympathy although by no means full agreement from his council. He was particularly alarmed by the prospect of Gustavus Adolphus leading a successful intervention in Germany, and then, with his reputation further enhanced and a very large army at his disposal, possibly backed by the Dutch navy, turning on Denmark. For Christian, leading the intervention himself was one way of precluding that possibility. On the personal level this concern may have extended to a wish to reassert both himself and his country in the face of upstart Swedish successes and growing international recognition, particularly in the aftermath of the humiliating climb-down over Sound tolls and other disputed issues in mid-1624.

These concerns seem to have stemmed less from reality than from the personality of 'the parochial and slightly paranoid Danish monarch', as he is called in one modern study.⁴⁹ Nevertheless they led to his

involvement in the war. The plight of Friedrich and the Palatinate doubtless also contributed to Christian's decision to intervene, although his repeated advice to his nephew to come to terms with Ferdinand suggests that to have been his preferred approach, while by this time Friedrich was already becoming a forlorn and increasingly irrelevant figure on the sidelines.

In June 1625 Christian moved south with his new army. This was not formally an act of war, as it merely took him further into the Lower Saxon Circle, where as *Kreisoberst* he was responsible for defence. Although this was a transparent technicality Ferdinand hesitated, but in mid-July Maximilian took the initiative. Still acting in his capacity as a commissioner appointed by the emperor to enforce Imperial law, he instructed Tilly to put the matter to the test by himself marching into Lower Saxon territory.⁵⁰ When he did so Christian accepted the challenge, and this was the point at which the Bohemian revolt and its aftermath moved from being a series of relatively localised campaigns, centred successively around Bohemia, the Palatinate, and Westphalia, to become the full-scale international conflict known as the Thirty Years War.

12

Epilogue

When asked ‘What do you work on?’, a historian whose subject is the Thirty Years War knows that after ‘When was that?’ the almost inevitable follow-up question is going to be ‘Well, what was it about?’ Whether there are simple answers in respect of other wars is debatable, but there certainly is not for the Thirty Years War. As noted in the opening to Chapter 1, even the definition of the war is not firm, as some historians confine the term to the core struggle in and around Germany, regarding hostilities during the same period in territories further afield as possibly related but none the less peripheral, while others view them as part of a single all-embracing conflict. Both concepts are arguable, but even for the simpler case it is hard to pinpoint a common cause or central issue, other than in terms so broad as to be almost meaningless. The problem is well illustrated by considering three commonly accepted components of the wider Thirty Years War, first the revolt and war in Bohemia in 1618 to 1620, a rebellion of Protestant aristocrats against their Catholic king, secondly the war of the Mantuan Succession in Italy from 1628 to 1631, a proxy battle over the inheritance fought mainly by France, Spain and the emperor, all Catholic, and thirdly the war between Denmark and Sweden of 1643 to 1645, a struggle for regional dominance between the two kingdoms, both of which were Protestant. The problem is further compounded by the long duration of the war, as not only the main participants but also the apparent issues changed over time. Thus while religion and the fate of the Palatinate were significant in the early stages, by the later years religion was much less central, as the key belligerents were the Catholic Habsburgs on one side and Catholic France on the other, the latter aided and abetted by Protestant Sweden, while Elector Friedrich V, the ‘Winter King’, was long since dead and his Palatinate was only one of many devastated territories.

Despite this there have been repeated attempts at structuralist interpretations of the long-drawn-out conflict. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Wilson has pointed to the problems of fitting such a complex event into one or more of the convenient categories put forward, notably the internationalist view, the state-building concept, the 'general crisis of the seventeenth century', Marxist interpretations, 'confessionalisation' and religious war.¹ However even among less theoretical historians there is still a lingering attachment to some kind of general explanation. It is hard to dissent from Wilson's broad observation that 'what should properly be called the Thirty Years War was a struggle over the political and religious order of central Europe', but his apparently more specific statement that 'it was fought about the meaning of the Imperial constitution' presents difficulties of definition and interpretation.² Others contend that the Imperial constitution was 'the one central issue', or that the war was 'a struggle between competing visions of the constitution of the Holy Roman Empire', but the precise meaning of such neat encapsulations remains problematic.³ None of these concepts are 'wrong', however, and indeed almost the opposite is the case, as they all contain elements of truth, which of itself demonstrates that attempts to categorise the Thirty Years War by means of comprehensive theories are never likely to be satisfactory.

Wilson has also noted that the war is traditionally narrated as 'a series of chronological phases, each beginning with the entry of a new major belligerent', commenting that 'most historians have sought refuge in this convenient framework when marshalling their material'.⁴ Again there is some truth in this implicit criticism, but nevertheless the central fact remains. On each occasion during the thirty years when one side seemed to be nearing a defeat which might have brought the war to an end a new belligerent, or substantial additional support from an existing one, did indeed appear. Thus Emperor Ferdinand II was successively rescued by Maximilian's Catholic League, Wallenstein, and the Spanish, while the anti-Habsburg side depended first on Mansfeld and Bethlen Gabor, then on Georg of Baden-Durlach and the 'Mad Halberstädter', next on Christian IV of Denmark, after him on Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, and finally on France under Richelieu. The key point in interpreting the war, however, is to recognise that none of these newcomers, or the various minor participants, simply replicated their predecessors or the original combatants in terms of motivation and aims. Each had their own interests to defend and their own ambitions to pursue, so that as the combatants progressively changed so did the nature and direction of the war, reflecting a corresponding mutation of its ongoing causes. Put

simply, each successive phase arose more from the outcome and consequences of the previous one than from any pre-existing and enduring sources of the conflict as a whole.

This concept of the Thirty Years War as a chain reaction leads back directly to the thesis of this book, namely that its origins lie principally neither in the inter-confessional stresses in Germany nor in the wider international tensions in the years leading up to 1618, but in the revolt in Bohemia, the consequences of which subsequently embroiled the wider Empire. As has been observed at various points, the most striking feature of the situation in Germany, not only before 1618 but for some years afterwards, was not the readiness but the reluctance of the two main confessional groups to resort to war. The most dangerous point was back in 1610, and had Henri IV not been assassinated a larger war than the relatively minor fighting around Jülich might have ensued, but although that is a common speculation it is also possible that further conflict might instead have been limited or even avoided by the king's major show of force. As it was, it might be thought surprising that the situation did not escalate further, with both sides having recently resorted to the formation of military organisations and recruited substantial armies, but as Albrecht rightly comments, 'both alliances shrank back from a breach and recognised that their own advantage lay in the maintenance of peace'.⁵

That remained true throughout the following years, and even in 1619, when although the Union and the League again recruited armies in Germany they were intent on defensive sabre-rattling rather than planning an actual inter-confessional war. The Cold War analogy employed in Chapter 2 is relevant. Both sides armed and placed themselves on a war footing not in order to prosecute a war but to deter the other side from doing so. As with the Cold War of the 1960s, this carried with it the risk of a miscalculation giving rise to a war which neither side intended, but that did not in fact happen, as the war which ensued was not between Union and League, and it arose from the fall-out of the Bohemian conflict, not from the stand-off in Germany.

The significance in Germany of the enduring strife over secularised church properties remains fundamental, as this rather than religion in the doctrinal sense lay at the heart of all the major inter-confessional disputes, whether over the courts, the Reichstag procedures, or other contentious issues. That apart, Maximilian of Bavaria was in essence right, despite his obvious ulterior motive, when he told Johann Georg of Saxony that Lutherans and Catholics had lived together without major conflict on the basis of the religious peace of Augsburg 'until

the Calvinist spectre began to intrude its noxious seeds and weeds'.⁶ He though, like many subsequent historians, probably over-estimated the political significance of the Calvinists, notably from the Palatinate, as although they were a noisy long-term irritant they were never likely to achieve anything of consequence against the Catholics unless they could enlist the support of Saxony and the like-minded Lutheran territories. In military terms the Calvinist-led Union was never strong enough to have confronted what they perceived as the Catholic and Habsburg threat without powerful allies, which they found only briefly in 1610.

Given the anti-Calvinist hostility among the north-German Lutherans, the only issue with the potential to impel them into united action would have been a physical Catholic attempt to repossess the secularised properties. Some of the more alarmist Protestant princes and politicians took this to be a serious possibility, claiming to be ready to fight over it if necessary, but the more moderate Saxons and their allies generally discounted this and other aspects of the supposed Catholic threat. Such an attempt would have required substantial military support, and even with the unpredictable Rudolf II still on the Imperial throne this was not a realistic proposition, while after Matthias's accession it was out of the question. Even so the threat, however remote, was a large part of the *raison d'être* of the Protestant Union, together with the Donauwörth incident which seemed to confirm the possibility, while even the north-German Lutherans took care to get guarantees against forcible repossession in the Mühlhausen agreement of 1620 before supporting or remaining neutral to the invasion of Bohemia. On the Catholic side too there were some who worried about a possible pre-emptive Protestant attack, although this was equally unrealistic, not least because it is hard to see what form such a move could in practice have taken.

The ramifications of the wrangle over secularised church properties in Germany could have caused a war but did not, at least not until after 1629, when Emperor Ferdinand II actually set repossession in motion, but in entirely different circumstances after a decade of war and with two large armies available to him after the defeat of Denmark. Thus the origins of the Thirty Years War lay not in Germany but in Bohemia, and the origins of the war are in fact largely the origins of the revolt, which is why they have been described and discussed in detail in the central chapters of this book.

There is nevertheless a distinction to be drawn between the origins of the war and the causes of its continuation during the remainder of the thirty years. As noted above, the latter mutated along with the

belligerents as time progressed, and a stage-by-stage analysis is required to provide a full interpretation. By 1648 not only were Bohemia and the Palatinate no longer significant, but almost all the original issues had been superseded and the principal individuals initially involved were long dead. Maximilian I of Bavaria and Johann Georg I of Saxony enjoyed the dubious distinction of being the only leading princes to hold office throughout the war, in the course of which even Maximilian tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to desert Emperor Ferdinand II and to make a separate peace with France and Sweden, while Johann Georg changed sides twice in the course of the conflict. No over-arching explanation based on simple underlying causes is ever likely to successfully accommodate these and the many other paradoxes and complexities which arose during the Thirty Years War. That, however, is the nature of history.

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19. Evans, Habsburg Monarchy, 66.
20. Ritter, II, 395 f.
21. Brockmann, 46 ff.
22. Brockmann, 50, ff.
23. Documenta Bohemica, II, 29 f.
24. Parker, War, 40 f.
25. Gindely, Krieg, I, 161 ff., 168.
26. Documenta Bohemica, II, 31.

7 Insurrection

1. Ritter, II, 454 f.; Gindely, Krieg, I, 244.
2. Gindely, Krieg, I, 246 ff.
3. Gindely, Krieg, I, 258; Wolf, 322.
4. Testimony, fol. 15 r.
5. Testimony, fol. 16 v.
6. Testimony, fol. 16 v.
7. Documenta Bohemica, II, 9; I, 92.
8. Skála.
9. Wolf, 324 ff. (in German); Schwarz, 344 ff. (in English; part only).
10. Documenta Bohemica, II, 42 ff.; Lorenz, 221 ff.; Hurter, VII, 262.
11. Mortimer, Eyewitness, 196 ff.; Mortimer, Style, 98 ff.
12. Testimony, fol. 26 v.
13. Wahrhaftige Zeitung, fifth page.
14. Wolf, 326 ff.
15. Testimony, fol. 26 v., fol. 38 v., fol. 44 v.
16. Wilson, Tragedy, 269, 272.
17. Schormann, 25.
18. Asch, 47 f.
19. Burkhardt, Krieg, 79.
20. Kampmann, Krieg, 34.
21. Schmidt, Krieg, 29.
22. Arndt, 62 f.
23. Theatrum, I, 16 f.
24. Khevenhüller, IX, 29 ff., here 32.
25. Sturmberger, Hradschin, 77.
26. Hurter, VII, 259, 265.
27. Gindely, Krieg, I, 273.
28. Gindely, Krieg, I, 274.
29. Concepte, fol. 3v (p. 486).
30. Mikušek, 73 f.
31. Gindely, Gegenreformation, 27.
32. Gindely, Krieg, IV, 62.
33. Gindely, Gegenreformation, 27.
34. Testimony, fol. 1r, 37r, 38v, 55r.
35. Testimony, fol. 44v, 45r.
36. Testimony, fol. 26r, 26v.
37. Testimony, fol. 16v.
38. Gindely, Krieg, I, 273 f.
39. Testimony, fol. 17 r.
40. Gindely, Krieg, I, 278 ff., 280.
41. d'Elvert, 15 f.
42. Fau, 20.
43. Lorenz, 224 f.
44. Documenta Bohemica, II, 293 f.
45. Testimony, fol. 1 r.; Khevenhüller, IX, 32.
46. Testimony, fol. 13 r.
47. Mann, 122, 124, 390, etc.

8 No Way Back

1. Acta Bohemica.
2. Ritter, III, 3.
3. Testimony, fol.17 r.
4. Gindely, Krieg, I, 303; Gindely, Brüder, II, 427 f.; Novák, 342 ff.
5. Sturmberger, Aufstand, 36.
6. Burkhardt, Krieg, 79; Mann, 175 f.
7. d'Elvert, 79.
8. d'Elvert, 81, 83; Hurter, VIII, 599.
9. Lorenz, 236 f.
10. Lorenz, 237 ff.
11. Parts of this section follow Mortimer, Wallenstein, Chapter 3.
12. Krüssmann, 637 ff.
13. Krüssmann, 640 f.; Parker, War 41.
14. Lorenz, 253 ff.
15. Ritter, III, 6.
16. Brockmann, 62.
17. Hammer-Purgstall, IV, Anhang, 112 f.
18. Gindely, Krieg, I, 397 f., 401.
19. Ritter, III, 9.
20. Brightwell, Spain, second article, 377.
21. Mann, 158.
22. Documenta Bohemica, II, 151 ff., 170 ff.
23. Testimony, fol. 48 v.; Gindely, Gegenreformation, 26.
24. Bilhöfer, 63 f.
25. Documenta Bohemica, II, 173 f., 175 f.
26. See Chapter 5; also Chlumecky, 523.
27. Sturmberger, Aufstand, 50.
28. Bilhöfer, 68; Wilson, Tragedy, 292.
29. Kleinman, 7, 10 f.
30. Kleinman, 12 f., 16.
31. Uetterodt, 209 ff.
32. Kleinman, 14, 20.
33. Müller, 248 f.
34. Theatrum, I, 200 ff.
35. Mann, 147.
36. Sturmberger, Aufstand, 55.
37. Lorenz, 376 ff.
38. Lorenz, 394 ff.
39. Bilhöfer, 64.
40. Wilson, Tragedy, 285.
41. Pursell, 6.
42. Pursell, 293 f.
43. Bilhöfer, 71.
44. Pursell, 52.
45. Pursell, 22, 5, 4.
46. Ritter, III, 81.
47. Albrecht, Politik, 35 f.

48. *Theatrum*, I, 173 ff.; Mann, 148.
 49. Arndt, 64.

9 The Search for Allies

1. Ritter, III, 37, 40.
2. Wilson, *Tragedy*, 288.
3. Wilson, *Tragedy*, 286.
4. Ritter, II, 273.
5. Ritter, III, 35.
6. Ritter, II, 208 f.; III, 67.
7. Wilson, *Religion*, 499.
8. Ritter, III, 67 f.
9. Ritter, III, 13.
10. Ritter, III, 32 f.
11. Ritter, III, 69 f.
12. Bilhöfer, 71.
13. Ritter, III, 73.
14. Ritter, III, 70 f.
15. Neuer-Landfried, 159 ff.
16. Neuer-Landfried, 162.
17. Ritter, III, 39.
18. Neuer-Landfried, 166, 170.
19. Albrecht, Maximilian, 285 ff.
20. Neuhaus, 13; Sturmberger, *Aufstand*, 71.
21. Stieve, 157 ff.
22. Albrecht, Maximilian, 1111 f.
23. Albrecht, Maximilian, 490 f.
24. Albrecht, Maximilian, 503; Kampmann, *Krieg*, 40.
25. Lorenz, 398 ff.
26. Albrecht, Maximilian, 507.
27. Neuer-Landfried, 178 f.
28. Albrecht, *Politik*, 40 f.
29. Brockmann, 139 f.
30. Ritter, III, 74 ff.
31. Burkhardt, *Sächsische Politik*, 5.
32. Ritter, III, 84 f., 82 ff.
33. Ritter, III, 86 ff.
34. Lorenz, 454 f.
35. Müller, 348.
36. Ritter, III, 89; Albrecht, Maximilian, 520.
37. Edel, 234.
38. Albrecht, Maximilian, 511.
39. Brightwell, *Spain*, first article, 123 ff.
40. Brightwell, *Spain*, second article, 387 ff.
41. Albrecht, *Politik*, 37 ff.; Albrecht, Maximilian, 514.
42. Albrecht, Maximilian, 510; Hölz, 376 ff.
43. Edel, 239 f.

44. Edel, 235 f.
45. Edel, 236 f., 240.
46. Edel, 238 f.
47. Duerloo, 480.
48. Brockmann, 170.

10 The Revolt Defeated

1. Ritter, III, 92.
2. *Theatrum*, I, 256.
3. Edel, 237.
4. Mortimer, Wallenstein, 154 ff.
5. Gotthard, *Konfession*, 304.
6. Albrecht, *Politik*, 42.
7. Gotthard, *Konfession*, 308.
8. Gotthard, *Konfession*, 306.
9. Gotthard, *Wende*, 410 f.
10. Ritter, III, 93 f.
11. Gotthard, *Konfession*, 308.
12. Edel, 241.
13. Duerloo, 485 f.
14. Gotthard, *Konfession*, 312 f.
15. Gotthard, *Konfession*, 308, 316, 289 f.
16. Gotthard, *Wende*, 415 f.
17. Gotthard, *Konfession*, 313 f.
18. Lorenz, 473 ff.
19. Gotthard, *Konfession*, 317 ff.
20. Duerloo, 501.
21. Sturmberger, *Aufstand*, 78 ff.
22. Albrecht, Maximilian, 523.
23. Albrecht, Maximilian, 527.
24. Albrecht, Maximilian, 526.
25. Sturmberger, *Aufstand*, 81 ff.
26. Albrecht, Maximilian, 528 ff.
27. Mortimer, Wallenstein, 83, 88.
28. Krüssmann, 641 f.
29. Albrecht, Maximilian, 530.
30. Sturmberger, *Aufstand*, 86 ff.
31. Guthrie, 63.
32. Gindely, *Berichte*, 177.
33. Gindely, *Berichte*, 6 f., 142.
34. Lorenz, 505, 508, 509.
35. Riezler, 83 ff.
36. Lorenz, 482.
37. Sturmberger, *Aufstand*, 90 f.
38. *Documenta Bohemica*, II, 271, 279; Csohány, 91.
39. Dvorský, 131 f., (497 f.), footnotes 6 and 9.
40. Hurter, VIII, 661 f.

41. Lorenz, 486.
42. Gindely, *Gegenreformation*, 7.
43. Gindely, *Berichte*, 62, 81.
44. Gindely, *Krieg*, III, 374.
45. *Theatrum*, I, 413.
46. Hurter, VIII, 662.
47. Köttschke and Kretschmar, 244.
48. Lorenz, 474.
49. Egler, 55.
50. Duerloo, 487.
51. Egler, 45 ff.
52. Egler, 49 ff.
53. Gindely, *Krieg*, III, 387.
54. Gindely, *Gegenreformation*, 7 f.
55. Mann, 169 f.
56. *Theatrum*, I, 483 f.; Gindely, *Krieg*, IV, 64 ff.
57. Hurter, VIII, 596 f.
58. Gindely, *Krieg*, IV, 68 f.; d'Elvert, 72.
59. Hurter, VIII, 597, 600.
60. d'Elvert, 78.
61. Gindely, *Krieg*, IV, 68 f.; d'Elvert, 64, 70, 75, 88.
62. Hurter, VIII, 600 f.
63. BLB, II, 102 (Kaplitz).
64. Gindely, *Krieg*, IV, 99 ff.
65. Gindely, *Gegenreformation*, 509.
66. Mortimer, *Wallenstein*, 41 f., 32.
67. Gindely, *Krieg*, IV, 596 f.
68. Lorenz, 487.
69. Evans, *Habsburg Monarchy*, 70.
70. Sturmberger, *Aufstand*, 95 ff.

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1. Maier, 17.
2. Albrecht, *Maximilian*, 554.
3. Kampmann, *Reichsrebellion*, 60 ff.
4. Lorenz, 512 f.
5. Kampmann, *Reichsrebellion*, 64 f.
6. Lorenz, 519 ff., 533 ff.
7. Gotthard, *Konfession*, 341.
8. Maier, 19.
9. Gotthard, *Konfession*, 346.
10. Albrecht, *Maximilian*, 547 f.
11. Lockhart, 87 f.
12. Lockhart, 90 ff.
13. Wilson, *Tragedy*, 327, 314.
14. Mortimer, *Wallenstein*, 88 ff.
15. Wilson, *Tragedy*, 323.

16. Wilson, Tragedy, 324 f.
17. Mortimer, Wallenstein, 71, 85.
18. Wilson, Tragedy, 314 ff.
19. Wilson, Tragedy, 319 f., 325.
20. Wertheim, 271 ff.
21. Opel, 320.
22. Wedgwood, 157; *Theatrum*, 1, 668.
23. Opel, 306, 320.
24. Opel, 304 f., 307.
25. Wedgwood, 150.
26. NDB, 8, 353; Wertheim, 253.
27. Ehrenpreis, Gerichtsbarkeit, 248 ff.
28. NDB, 6, 198.
29. Wilson, Tragedy, 328, 341.
30. Parker, War, 65; Kampmann, Krieg, 48.
31. NDB, 6, 199.
32. Maier, 28.
33. Kaiser, 205 ff.
34. Lorenz, 487.
35. Brockmann, 164.
36. Brockmann, 208.
37. Brockmann, 210 ff.; Albrecht, Maximilian, 548 f.
38. Albrecht, Maximilian, 566; Brockmann, 229, 214 ff.
39. Bireley, Jesuits, 57 ff.
40. Brockmann, 216 f.; Albrecht, Maximilian, 552 f.
41. Brockmann, 219 f.; Albrecht, Maximilian, 566.
42. Albrecht, Maximilian, 567.
43. Brockmann, 229 ff.
44. Wilson, Tragedy, 340.
45. Lockhart, 97 f.
46. Parker, War, 70; Lockhart, 104.
47. Lockhart, 104 f.
48. Lockhart, 128.
49. Lockhart, 119.
50. Hallwich, I, 171.

12 Epilogue

1. Wilson, Causes.
2. Wilson, Causes, 579; Wilson, Religion, 513.
3. Asch, 3; Pursell, xi.
4. Wilson, Causes, 555.
5. Albrecht, Maximilian, 430.
6. Quoted in Chapter 11.

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Terms which appear continually throughout the text are not indexed, e.g. Catholic, Protestant, Habsburg, Bohemia, etc. For other frequent terms, where long page ranges are shown the relevant item appears on *almost* every page.

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