

Introduction

Iniquissimam pacem justissimo bello antefero.

I prefer, says the sagacious and humane Cicero, the most impolitic and disadvantageous peace, to the justest war; and yet with what precipitancy and on what trifling occasions do countries often rush into war with each another!

– Erasmus, *Adagia*, 1508 ¹

BY 1530 EUROPE had tired of war. For decades the respective rulers of France and the Habsburg

Empire had squabbled over control of the wealth and power of the Italian city-republics and the Papal States. Open warfare broke out in 1494; the next sixty years were marked by both diplomatic intrigue and armed conflict.

Alliances were formed, broken, and reformed. The Sforza family of Milan were the first to manipulate the foreign powers; in forging an alliance with the French they hoped to secure Milan's position against the rising influence of Venice. The results were disastrous. Both Naples and Milan fell under Habsburg control after the French were comprehensively defeated in 1526. In Rome, Pope Julius II first aligned himself with the French against the Venetians, then reversed course and backed the Venetians against the French; such outrageous diplomatic manoeuvres were designed to maintain the delicate position of the Papal States, but Julius's duplicity and corruption, coupled with that shown by his successor Clement VII against the Habsburgs, led to the Sack of Rome by Habsburg troops in 1527.

The elevation of Charles V to the title of Holy Roman Emperor in 1521 inflamed tensions with France still further, for many of those who had supported Charles had been bribed to ensure the title of Emperor remained out of France's grasp. The capture of Francis I at the Battle of Pavia in 1525 prompted the French to forge an unprecedented alliance between Catholic France and the

¹ Translated in "Proverbs, Chiefly Taken from the Adagia of Erasmus with Explanations", Egerton, 1814.