The queen returned to power more determined than ever to carry out her favourite scheme of obtaining an Italian principality for her eldest son Don Carlos. As France and England had shown themselves lukewarm in the matter, she resolved to turn to her husband’s enemy, Charles VI. This scheme was suggested by a Dutch adventurer, Ripperda, who inspired Elizabeth with a belief that the Austrian alliance would enable her not only to effect her object in Italy, but also to regain Gibraltar and Minorca for Spain. This was rendered the more probable by the fact that Charles VI. had quarrelled with England about the foundation of the Ostend Com­pany. The conduct of the affair was entrusted to Rip­perda himself, and while he was at Vienna a great impulse was given to the negotiation by a complete rupture between Spain and France. The duke of Bourbon, who had become chief minister in France after the death of Orleans, had set himself to reverse the policy of his pre­decessor. To complete this, he sent the infanta back to Spain and married Louis XV. to Maria Leczinska, daughter of the ex-king of Poland. This insult removed the last scruples of Philip V. about the Austrian alliance, and in April 1725 Ripperda concluded the treaty of Vienna. The mutual renunciations arranged by the Quadruple Alliance were confirmed : Spain recognized the settlement of the Austrian succession by the Pragmatic Sanction and promised great commercial privileges to the Ostend Company, while Charles VI. pledged himself to secure the succession of Don Carlos in Parma and Tuscany and to use his influence with England to obtain the restitu­tion of Gibraltar and Minorca. By a secret treaty Charles further undertook, in the case of England’s refusal, to assist Spain with arms and also to send aid to the Jacobites. These terms were soon divulged by the indis­creet vanity of Ripperda himself, and England and France formed the counter-league of Hanover (September 1725), which was also joined by Frederick William I. of Prussia, though only for a short time.

Ripperda returned to Spain, to be rewarded with the office of chief minister. But his success seems to have turned his head ; his boasts about the grand results to be expected from the Austrian alliance proved to be ill- founded, aud his fall was as sudden as his rise had been. After a brief period of exile in England, he sought a new home in Morocco, where he became a convert to Islam and died in 1737. But his policy was continued by his successor, Don Joseph Patino, who sent a fleet to lay siege to Gibraltar. Europe was now divided into two hostile leagues, but the outbreak of a general war was averted, partly by the pacific inclinations of Walpole in England and Fleury in France, and partly by the growing coolness between Austria and Spain. Charles VI. had been led into the treaty of Vienna by a momentary pique against England, but he soon realized that he had more to lose than to gain by favouring the Spanish designs upon Italy. Accordingly, in May 1727, while the siege of Gibraltar was proceeding, he threw over his obligations to Spain and signed the preliminaries of a peace with England and France. The Ostend Company was suspended, and the questions about Parma, Tuscany, and Gibraltar were referred to a European congress at Soissons. The Spanish Government found it impossible to hold out in isolation, and accepted these terms by the convention of the Pardo (March 1728).

The congress of Soissons was a complete failure, and the irrepressible energy of the Spanish queen discovered a new method of obtaining her ends. The birth of a son to Louis XV. removed into the background all idea of the succession in France, and the attitude of Charles VI. proved that he would do nothing for Don Carlos. Under

these circumstances there was no alternative but to sacri­fice the prospect of recovering Gibraltar and Minorca and to seek the alliance of England and France. By the treaty of Seville (November 1729) these powers, with Holland, concluded an offensive and defensive alliance with Spain. The privileges which the latter country had conferred upon the Ostend Company were revoked. Don Carlos was recognized as the heir to Parma and Tuscany, and to enforce his claims these provinces were to be occupied by 6000 Spanish troops. Charles VI., astounded at this sudden change in the aspect of affairs, took active steps to oppose this occupation of the duchies. He collected 30,000 troops in Italy, and when the old duke of Parma died in January 1731 he seized his territories as an imperial fief. Elizabeth called upon her allies to carry out the treaty of Seville, but Walpole and Fleury were unwilling to resort to hostilities. Luckily Charles VI. thought more of securing his daughter’s succession in Austria than of anything else. By promising that Eng­land would guarantee the Pragmatic Sanction, Walpole induced the emperor to conclude the second treaty of Vienna (March 1731), which dissolved the Ostend Com­pany and confirmed the provisions of the treaty of Seville. In 1732 English ships conveyed Don Carlos and the Spanish troops to Italy. Parma and Piacenza were immediately occupied, and the grand-duke of Tuscany acknowledged Don Carlos as his heir.

In the long and intricate series of negotiations of which we have given a brief summary the guiding thread is the grasping ambition of the queen of Spain. That ambition was by no means satisfied by the results obtained in the treaty of Vienna. Austria still held the Italian provinces of Spain and was looking out for an opportunity to expel Don Carlos from central Italy. England retained her hold upon Gibraltar and Minorca, and claimed a maritime and colonial supremacy which threatened to thwart all schemes for the revival of Spanish commerce. Elizabeth never relinquished for a moment the hope of humiliating England and expelling the Hapsburgs from Italy. Cir­cumstances at this time were more favourable than they had ever been before. The able administration of Patino, “ the Colbert of Spain,” had restored order in the Spanish finances, and had already made considerable strides towards the creation of a formidable fleet. But the great advantage lay in the fact that the death of Orleans and the birth of children to Louis XV. had removed all obstacles in the way of an alliance between Spain and France. The close union between the two branches of the house of Bourbon, which the Grand Alliance had endeavoured to avert, and which circumstances had post­poned for twenty years, was now to become an accom­plished fact. In 1733 “an eternal and irrevocable family compact ” was signed by the Count Rottembourg and Don Joseph Patino. France and Spain pledged themselves to pursue a common policy in regard both to Austria and England, the object of which was to destroy the Italian ascendency of the one and the commercial monopoly of the other. This treaty, which constituted a danger to Europe hardly less than the aggressions of Louis XIV., was kept a profound secret, and, though its existence was more than suspected at the time, its full importance has not been apprehended until recent times.

The first opportunity for carrying out this common policy was offered by the dispute about the Polish succes­sion which broke out in 1733 between Stanislaus Leczin- ski and Augustus III. of Saxony. Austria and Russia supported the latter prince, while Louis XV. espoused the cause of his father-in-law. But the war in Poland itself was of very secondary importance compared with the hostilities to which it gave rise in southern Europe.