French operations, and only campaigns of the methodical and non-committal kind were planned for Italy@@1 and the Low Countries. Villeroy and Bouffiers commanded the French in the Low Countries, Tallard in Lorraine, Villars in Alsace, and Vendôme in Italy.

In the Netherlands the French field army was behind the lines of Brabant, the Spanish troops in the lines of Flanders (Antwerp-Ghent-Aire). Together the two considerably outnumbered Marlborough (90,000 against 50,000), but the duke managed to be first in the field. As early as February Rhein­berg had been taken, and in May he followed up this success by the capture of Bonn, returning to the Meuse before Villeroy had assembled his army at Diest. Marlborough’s plan was to break the immensely long line of defence of the French and Spaniards by the capture of Antwerp. One Dutch corps under Coehoorn was to assemble in the Sluys-Hulst region, and another under Opdam at Bergen-op-Zoom and Marlborough, after manoeuvring Villeroy’s field army out of the way, was to join them before the fortress. Marlborough executed his own share of the movement with his usual skill, he pushed back Villeroy towards the Mehaigne and at the right moment, giving them the slip, marched for Antwerp via Hasselt. Villeroy, soon discover­ing this, hastened thither as fast as possible, and the Dutch generals enabled him to emerge from the manœuvre with a handsome victory, for Coehoorn (in order to fill his own pockets, it has been suggested) had departed on a raid into West Flanders and Opdam was left alone at Eeckeren in front of Antwerp, where Bouffiers and the Spanish general Bedmar surprised him (June 30) and put his corps to flight before Marlborough could come to his assistance. In disgust the great captain then resigned himself to a war of small sieges on the Meuse. The campaign closed with the capture of Huy (Aug. 25) and Limbourg (Sept. 27). On the Rhine great projects were entertained by the French, nothing less than the capture of Vienna by a combined Franco-Bavarian-Hungarian army being intended. Villars began by capturing Kehl (March 10) under the very eyes of the margrave, who dared not risk a battle lest the Bavarians coming up in his rear should destroy his weakened army. The Bavarians had in fact no such intention. The elector, while carrying on a trifling war with a small imperial army under Count Styrum, insisted that Villars should cross the Black Forest and join him, which Villars was unwilling to do thus early in the year, as two-thirds of his officers were as usual on leave or detached on recruiting duties. Courtier though he was, the marshal would not stir even in spite of the king’s orders until he was ready. At the end of April, leaving Tallard alone to defend Alsace and Lorraine against the margrave, Villars plunged into the defiles of the Black Forest and on the 8th of May joined the elector at Ebingen. All seemed favourable for the advance on Vienna, but at the last moment the elector half repented of his affiance with the enemies of Germany and proposed instead a junction with Vendôme by way of Tirol. This proposal came to nothing, the Tirolese were soon roused to revolt by the misconduct of the ill-disciplined Bavarians, and Vendôme, who, like Luxembourg, was a giant in battle and a sluggard in camp, would not stir. The active Villars meantime was reduced to impotence and faced Styrum in an entrenched camp at Dillingen on the Danube, neither side offering battle.

Villars had posted a protective force at Ulm to contain the margrave’s army should it turn back upon him, and this, after an engagement at Munderkingen (July 31) induced the cautious Louis to return to the Rhine. Five weeks later, however, the margrave returned in full force, and moving by the right bank of the Danube reached Augsburg on the 6th of September. The elector, returning from his futile Tirol expedition, had already rejoined Villars at Dillingen, and the marshal persuaded him to attack Styrum before the two imperial generals could join

forces. The result was the battle of Hochstett@@2 (Sept. 20) in which the elector and Villars won a great victory, at a loss of only 1000 men to Styrum’s 11,000. Rarely indeed had an 18th- century general so great an opportunity of finishing a war at one bIow. But even Villars saw no better use for the victory than the unimpeded junction of his own army and Tallard’s and winter quarters in Württemberg, and the elector on the other hand was principally anxious to evict the margrave’s army from his dominions. The question was referred to Versailles, and another month passed away in inactivity. Tallard remained on the Rhine, and Villars in disgust applied to be recalled. The margrave, entrenched as usual, kept the field for another month and then retired to the Lake of Constance, where, in a still unexhausted district, he spent the winter. The elector wintered in the Iller with the combined army. Tallard meanwhile invested Landau and defeated a detachment sent from Marlborough’s distant army to relieve the place in the battle of Spire (Nov. 10), which was almost as costly to the allies as Hochstett. Landau surrendered on the 12th of November. Old Breisach, besieged by Vauban, capitulated on the 6th of September. Thus in Germany, though the grand advance on Vienna had come to nothing, the French had-won two important victories and established an army in Bavaria. More than this, under the prevailing conditions of warfare, it was impossible to expect. In Italy, on the other hand, Vendôme, although no longer opposed by Eugene, achieved nothing. After a raid towards Trieste he was brought back hurriedly by the news that Victor Amadeus of Savoy had changed sides, and though he was victorious in a few skirmishes and re-established touch with France by capturing Asti, he failed to prevent the Imperialists, under Guido Starhemberg, from slipping past his position in Lombardy and joining the duke of Savoy in Piedmont.

The campaign of 1704, though in the Low Countries and in Italy practically nothing was done, is memorable for what was probably the greatest strategical operation in the 18th century, Marlborough’s march to the Danube. At the outset the elector and Marsin (Villars’ successor) were on the Iller, between Ulm and Memmingen, Tallard between Strassburg and Landau, Villeroy as usual between the Brabant lines and the Meuse. Between Villeroy and Tallard there was a small force on the Moselle, intended to reinforce either. On the other side the Margrave Louis was in the Stockach-Engen region, with his own army and the relic of Styrum’s, but being responsible for guarding the whole of the Middle Rhine as well as for opposing the elector he was weak everywhere, and his defence of the Rhine was practically limited to holding the “ lines of Stollhofen,” a defensive position near Bühl in Baden. With Breisach and Kehl in their own hands, the French were more or less closely in touch with their comrades in Bavaria, and Tallard convoyed a large body of recruits for Marsin’s army through the Black Forest defiles. But in doing so he lost most of them by desertion, the margrave’s army dogged his march, and in fact no regular line of communication was established. Thus the five armies (Marlborough’s, Eugene’s, Tallard’s, Marsin’s and the margrave’s) engaged in this theatre of war, were moving and facing in all directions in turn in a most bewildering fashion. Marlborough’s purpose at any rate was quite definite—to transfer a large corps from the Low Countries to Bavaria and there in concert with the allies in that quarter to crush the elector decisively. He took no one into his confi- dence. The timid Dutch were brought, not without difficulty, to assent to a Lower Rhine and Moselle campaign, of much the same sort as the Bonn expedition of 1703, but rather than be burdened with Dutch counsellors he forwent the assistance of the Dutch troops. These were left under Overkirk to defend the Meuse, and English and English-paid troops alone took part in the great venture. Meanwhile Tallard and Marsin, united at the moment of handing over the recruits, had promptly separated again. Tallard, Villeroy and the Versailles strategists.

@@@1 In this year began the Camisard insurrection, in the Cevennes, which necessitated the detachment of a considerable body of troops from Vendôme's army in Italy. Similarly both in 1702 and 17o3 the Hungarian insurrection compelled the Viennese government to keep back the reinforcements of which Eugene stood in need.

@@@2 Fought on the same battlefield as was Blenheim next year; the latter is consequently called by some the “ second battle of Hochstett.”