authority had been exercised by a series of chief ministers, —Lerma, Olivares, and Haro,—and this was the only way in which the unity of the executive power could now be maintained. The favour of the queen-mother raised to this position her confessor, Father Nithard, a native of Styria. He was a man of ability and experience, and set himself to cope with the most glaring evils of the state. He endeavoured to dimininish the public expend­iture by limiting the salaries of officials, and by putting an end to the abuses which hindered the commerce with the colonies. But he was soon called upon to face unexpected difficulties. Louis XIV. advanced a claim, on behalf of his wife, to certain territories in the Nether­lands in virtue of the so-called “law of devolution.” This was an old custom by which the children of the first marriage succeeded, to the exclusion of all later descendants. As Spain resisted the claim, the French invaded Flanders and overran Franche-Comté. The regent was compelled to purchase the restoration of the latter province by ceding part of Flanders to France in the treaty of Aix- la-Chapelle (1668). At the same time the independence of Portugal was finally acknowledged. These disasters increased the jealousy with which the Spanish nobles regarded the rule of a Jesuit and a foreigner. A strong opposition party was formed under the leadership of Don John of Austria, and in 1669 Nithard was compelled to resign. But among the nobles themselves there was little unity, and a difference arose as to the policy to be pursued when Louis XIV. attacked Holland in 1672. The queen- mother was naturally on the side of Austria, and her influence was sufficient to secure the adhesion of Spain to the first European coalition against France. This success she followed up by obtaining the post of chief minister for another favourite, Fernando de Valenzuela, who was appointed marquis of Villafierra and raised to the rank of a grandee of Spain. This revived the jealousy of the nobles, who again formed a league for the maintenance of their privileges under Don John of Austria. This time they were completely successful. Not only was Valenzuela banished, but Maria Anna herself was compelled to retire from the court and to take up her residence in Toledo. Don John was now all-powerful. A natural antipathy to the policy of the regent led him to draw aloof from the Austrian alliance and to attach himself to France. A marriage was concluded between Charles II. and Maria Louisa of Orleans. It was hoped that by this means better terms would be obtained from Louis XIV., but in the treaty of Nimeguen Spain had to surrender Franche- Comté and fourteen fortresses in Flanders. This treaty marks the complete loss by Spain of its position as a first-rate power. Henceforth it could only exist by the support of those states which resented the aggrandizement of France. Don John was no more successful in his domestic than in his foreign policy. His industry was as unwearying as that of Philip II. himself, and he deter­mined to rule independently of all interested advisers. The reform from which he hoped most was a revocation of the crown domains which had passed into private hands. But the scheme met with natural opposition from the nobles, and he died in 1679 without having accomplished anything. For a year Charles II. endeavoured to rule in person with the help of the ordinary council, but the attempt only showed how the strength of the monarchy was bound up with the personal character of the ruler. “Charles V.,” says Mignet, “had been both general and king; Philip II. was merely king, Philip III. and Philip IV. had not been kings; Charles II. was not even a man.” From infancy Charles’s health had been so defective that his death had appeared an imminent contingency, and his intellect was as feeble as his body. It was impossible for

him to exercise any effective control over the government, and he was little more than a tool in the hands of the nobles, who, under Don Luis de Haro, had recovered much of the political influence from which Olivares had excluded them. In 1680 the office of first minister was given to the greatest of Spanish magnates, the duke of Medina- Celi. It was at this time that Louis XIV. was conducting his famous *reunions,* and the weakness of Spain enabled him to annex without opposition Courtrai, Dixmude, and the great fortress of Luxemburg. Medina-Celi, dis­gusted with his thankless task, resigned in 1685, and his place was taken by Count Oropesa. The new minister revived the alliance with Austria, and Spain became a member of the league of Augsburg in 1686. The success of the league seemed to be almost assured by the Revolution which gave the crown of England to William III., the leader of the opposition to Louis XIV. But in spite of apparently overwhelming odds France more than held her own, and Spain was humiliated by the capture of Urgel and Barcelona. Ministers held office only at the will of court factions, and the first disaster was fatal to Oropesa. Spain continued to play a secondary part in the war, which was concluded in 1697 by the treaty of Ryswick, the first for many years in which France did not obtain any addition of territory. The chief motive for Louis XIV.’s moderation was the desire to devote his attention to the approaching question of the Spanish succession.

The decline of Spain in the 17th century is not to be measured by its territorial losses. Holland had extorted a tardy recognition of its independence; Portugal was once more a separate kingdom ; Catalonia was reduced only to very doubtful submission ; France had seized upon Roussillon and Cerdagne, Franche-Comté, and great part of the southern Netherlands; French influence had been established in Italy as a counterpoise to that of Spain. But the weakness of the extremities, to which these facts bear conclusive testimony, was the result of still greater weakness at the centre. The population of the peninsula, estimated at twenty millions under the Arabs and at twelve under Ferdinand and Isabella, had fallen to less than six millions in the reign of Charles II. This decrease of numbers was doubtless due in the first place to the religious bigotry which had condemned thousands of Jews and Moriscoes to death or exile, but it is partly traceable to a fatal decline in the economic prosperity of the country. Agriculture, for which many parts of Spain were peculiarly fitted, had suffered from the departure of the Moriscoes and from a number of other causes. The want of any law of mortmain had led to the accumulation of at least one-fourth of the land in the hands of the monasteries, the most charitable but the most careless and conservative of landlords. Thanks to their obstinate adherence to obsolete methods of cultiva­tion, their estates produced little more than one per cent. on the outlay. The system of entail, which earlier monarchs had striven to restrict, made enormous strides in the 16th century, and most of the secular estates were inalienably concentrated in the hands of a few great nobles, who lived at Madrid and spent their revenues in lavish extravagance without any regard to the interests of their tenants. In the fertile provinces of Andalusia and Estremadura agriculture was entirely ruined by the system of sheep-farming. In the 12th century, when the country was exposed to the destructive forays of the Moors, the inhabitants had been forbidden to enclose their lands with either hedges or ditches, and successive kings had encouraged the rearing of huge flocks of sheep which could easily be driven over the open country into a place of safety. In the 16th and 17th centuries the condition