Principalities and City-States

invasion to back his demand that Mary wed his son the dauphin, driving the desperate young duchess to find a protector in Maximilian of Hapsburg. Still legally his fiancée, she hastily arranged the long-delayed marriage, and Maximilian as quickly took up the defense of his new wife's realm. Having restored order in the provinces and concluded peace with France in 1482, he was able, when Mary died the same year, to have their infant son, Philip, declared her successor in all the Burgundian territories. When Maximilian became emperor in 1493, Philip, known to history as "the Handsome," took over actual administration of this inheritance. His marriage to Joanna the Mad, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, however, was destined to subordinate Burgundian and Netherlandish interests to those of Spain, diverting his ancestors' grandiose dreams of territorial aggrandizement to new regions. In 1500, with the death of the last male heir, Joanna became heiress presumptive to the several Spanish crowns and all their dependencies in the Old World and the New. Philip's attention was inevitably and increasingly occupied by this immense inheritance.
WHILE princes were successfully consolidating their new city-states in Italy, Germany, and Burgundy, hereditary kings were busy welding the great fiefs of France and England and the petty kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula into centralized monarchies. These royal governments, not having been undermined by papal intervention, as was the Holy Roman Empire (see, in this series, Sidney Painter, *The Rise of the Feudal Monarchies*), were eventually able to tighten the loose feudal bonds linking the nobles to the crown. Further, since agriculture predominated in this area west of the Scheldt, Meuse, and Rhone—at least until the trans-European trade began to be diverted from the overland routes to the Atlantic—towns were generally too weak to attempt to gain their independence. Instead, they cooperated with the emerging bureaucratic authority of the central monarchies against the anarcho-misrule of the feudal nobles. With this support, and without the opposition of rich and powerful trading cities of the sort that had checked the ambitions of would-be kings in west-central Europe, the new royal governments of the West were...
able to subject the nobility, control the clergy, and create new fiscal administrations.

The Consolidation of States: Final Phase

Dynastic marriage-making was the favorite, if not always successful, technique of the "new monarchs" in their untiring efforts to extend their authority. Near the beginning of the century, the English king, Henry V, had attempted to acquire the French crown and end the Hundred Years' War by marrying the French Princess Catherine. Although this plan proved to be overambitious, Henry Tudor, somewhat later, was able to consolidate his hold on the English crown, which he had won in battle, by marrying Elizabeth of York, the heiress of his chief rival. And toward the end of the century Charles VIII added Brittany to the French crown by marrying the Duchess Anne. Most famous of all was the marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile in 1469. By uniting the two most important Iberian kingdoms, it laid the foundation for a great national monarchy in Spain.

In England and France, and to a lesser extent in Spain, one of the chief obstacles to the development of monarchical authority was the stubborn resistance of the princely rulers of the great appanages. Since the thirteenth century kings had frequently granted huge estates, called appanages, to younger sons who were not expected to inherit the crown (see Painter, *Rise of the Feudal Monarchies*), and by the end of the Middle Ages the practice was bearing bitter fruit in both England and France. In fact, throughout Europe appanages had grown so enormously in both size and number that they not only
challenged royal authority but even occasionally became autonomous states.

The new monarchs were diligent in their task of revamping old, and creating new, instruments of government. The kings of England, France, and Spain centered their growing bureaucracies in the royal council, which often acted as the supreme court of the realm. At the same time, new royal agents, or “king’s men” as they were called, increasingly insinuated themselves into the administration of local, feudal, and ecclesiastical courts, with the result that both laws and legal procedures became more uniform and effective, and the authority of the monarchy was extended and entrenched. Finally, new standing armies composed of infantry and cavalry supported by archers (later by artillery) established their superiority in the Hundred Years’ War and, because they were too expensive for any save national monarchies to maintain, greatly reinforced the new royal power. The effectiveness of these forces was further demonstrated in the capture of Granada from the Moors in 1492 and in the French invasion of Italy two years later.

The cost of the new bureaucracies and armies, however, could not be met by existing royal resources. In England, France, and Spain, the king’s ordinary revenues from crown lands, feudal dues, commodity monopolies, customs duties, and mint rights had declined seriously by 1300; and the traditional income from mines, markets tolls, fines, fees, and vacant fiefs or ecclesiastical benefices dwindled to insignificance. Even the feudal taxes and church grants, upon which the new monarchs now depended, were irregular and infrequent, and to make matters worse, existing fiscal machinery was inadequate and out of date. Various expedients, such as borrowing at
great discounts against future revenue or imposing forced loans, produced limited returns but no ultimate solutions. The inescapable conclusion confronting all monarchs was that taxes had to be collected more regularly and frequently. In France feudal payments such as scutages (taxes paid in lieu of customary service) and aids (money given to an overlord for unusual expenses) (see, in this series, Sidney Painter, Mediaeval Society) were combined with “extraordinary” taxes, theoretically levied on burghers for the defense of the realm in time of crisis, and all were collected annually. In other areas a greater reliance was placed on increased sales taxes, like the alcabala in Castile. In England the king failed to institute a high permanent tax but gained more control of existing revenues, especially of customs on wool and cloth. If, at the end of the century, royal income still remained inadequate for growing needs, the monarchs were, nevertheless, finally in command of sufficient resources to overwhelm any combination of recalcitrant feudal lords.

Increasingly the new centralized states either won the support of, or imposed their authority on, the more important elements of society. The church, weakened by schism, became everywhere more dependent on royal protection and more subservient to national interests. The once disputed Gallican Liberties—the doctrine that the church in France was not subject to direct papal control—was formally recognized in the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges in 1438, thus virtually transforming French bishops into royal agents. In Spain, too, the kings dominated the church, and through it the formidable power of the Inquisition, while in England the tradition of the crown’s authority in religious matters, already
established in the fourteenth century by limitations on the rights of foreign clergy to visit England and of English clergy to appeal to foreign (i.e., papal) courts—in the Statutes of Provisors and Praemunire—was maintained and reinforced. More important, the bourgeoisie rallied to the monarchs, largely in return for protection of their trade and preservation of the peace. French kings kept close watch on town governments and finances and made increasing use of bourgeois officials in the royal administration. The Spanish crown exercised less direct control of town affairs but pursued a policy of close cooperation with the burghers; and the English kings drew support from their commercial classes. Only the old feudal nobility failed, as a class, to contribute to the development of the new monarchies; but it was already too much weakened by foreign and civil wars and by economic changes to be of decisive importance.

While in west-central Europe common interests tended to develop within the limited territories of new city-states and principalities, reinforcing regionalism, the new monarchies in the West extended their jurisdiction to the larger areas of the nation-state. Nationalism—the self-conscious advocacy of the common cause of a “people” defined by political and linguistic associations—has become a dominant factor only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Even so, the awareness of speaking a common language and obeying a single ruler gave men of the fifteenth century the conviction that they shared economic and political interests, especially when the group or “nation” became personified in hero figures.

**Spain**

At the opening of the fifteenth century, the Iberian Peninsula was split into the three Christian kingdoms of
Castile, Aragon, and Portugal, the Moorish kingdom of Granada, and the tiny Christian kingdom of Navarre, which crossed the Pyrenees into France. With the exception of Aragon, these Iberian states had had little contact with the rest of Europe. Not only were they isolated by strong provincial traditions, but they were also divided into smaller units by innumerable local customs and institutions. Aragon, for example, was comprised of Aragon proper, Valencia, the Balearic Islands, and Catalonia. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, however, the five Iberian kingdoms had been reduced to two. Portugal was becoming a rich commercial nation, and Spain, thanks to a vast colonial empire in the New World and important possessions in Italy, was about to emerge as Europe's greatest power.

During the early fifteenth century, the nobles, clergy, and towns of the peninsula continued to exercise their ancient privileges and rights to exemptions, largely unhampered by their weak kings. Soon, however, a strong and stable monarchy appeared in Portugal. In alliance with the prosperous trading towns of the Atlantic littoral, the crown subdued the nobles and, through the inspired leadership of Prince Henry the Navigator, placed the kingdom in the forefront of European exploration and oceasic commerce. Ironically, however, in Castile, where the crown sometimes claimed the title of emperor, the crown was weaker than in any monarchy in Europe except the Holy Roman Empire. The absence of effective central government was largely due to the Islamic occupation and the long bitter struggle for the reconquest of the peninsula. The cities and towns, for example, were more often fortified centers of refuge from Moorish attack than true trading centers, and as a result had long carried the burdens and exercised the privileges of precarious, de
fiactØ independence. Largely on the basis of this essentially democratic military service, representatives of the towns dominated the Cortes, or representative assembly, particularly in matters involving money. In addition, the great nobles, or ricos hombres, tended to ignore the crown, while members of the clergy and the military orders had won, as a reward for their struggle with Islam, the privileges of tax exemption and the right of being judged by canon law. In Aragon, however, it was the towns that were weak and the nobles that controlled the Cortes. The intransigent independence of these great aristocrats is reflected in the very oath of allegiance to their king that tradition ascribes to them: "We, who are as good as you, swear to you, who are no better than we, to accept you as our king and sovereign lord, provided you observe all our liberties and laws: but if not, not." Finally, the great Catalan port of Barcelona, because of its size and wealth a phenomenon in itself, was able to use the military resources of the Aragonese crown to serve its interests. The acquisition of Sicily in 1410 and of Naples in 1434 made Barcelona the dominant commercial power on the western Mediterranean.

The culmination of Spain's mediaeval history came with the marriage of Isabella and Ferdinand in 1469 and the consequent union of Castile and Aragon. Following a complicated and protracted controversy over the succession to the Castilian throne, this marriage aroused strong opposition. The kings of Portugal and France tried desperately to prevent it, as did many nobles and rivals of Isabella in her native Castile. In eloquent testimony to the strength of the opposition, the Aragonese Prince Ferdinand slipped into a private home in Castile, disguised as a merchant, to celebrate what the outside world
and subsequent historians would regard as a particularly brilliant royal marriage.

The political result was the creation of something like a confederation. Castile and Aragon each retained its own Cortes, councils, laws, courts, armies, taxes, coins, and sovereignty. The subjects of the one were aliens in the other, and in theory there was neither a king of Spain nor a Spanish kingdom. In practice, however, the union produced important mutual advantages for both states, even though Castile rapidly became the dominant partner. Aragon, already suffering from the general stagnation of Mediterranean commerce, could still carry on her mercantile and maritime tradition by aiding the Castilians in their transatlantic ventures. Castilian wool was manufactured into cloth in, and exported by, Barcelona, a port Columbus had frequented long before he began serving Castile. In return, Castilian troops supported and even expanded Aragon's Mediterranean empire, until by 1529 it dominated all of Italy. Thus began the amalgamation of the two major Spanish kingdoms.

Their Catholic majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella, set out to replace the old mediaeval administration with a new central bureaucracy. First they reduced the great nobles to a courtier class by forcing them to disgorge huge sums to the royal treasury, by systematically demolishing their castles, and by transferring their authority in local administration to agents of the crown. Finally, with the Audiencia, a powerful secular court, the monarchs developed an effective means of dealing with recalcitrant aristocrats when normal administrative methods failed. The palace guard, created to siphon off the military energies of the nobility, became the nucleus of a royal standing army; and the hitherto independent
and powerful military orders of fighting monks were brought under royal command by the expedient of forcing each order to elect King Ferdinand Grand Master. The old bernandades, leagues of towns with their own armed forces, were reorganized as a royal police to maintain law and order. Central control of local affairs was further reinforced by the appointment of royal watchdogs, or corregidores, within the towns, which now benefiting more from the unaccustomed order than they ever had from their old liberties, raised no serious objections to the practice. This new central power was exercised through a maze of mediaeval councils that was gradually enlarged, restaffed, and wholly transformed into a dedicated and independent royal bureaucracy, supported by the Cortes’ imposition of permanent new taxes such as the alcabala. The church, too, was reduced to subservience and reorganized. The famous Inquisition, for example, which was originally established in Castile to deal with Jews and Moors suspected of mere token conversion to Christianity and which came to epitomize the union of political and religious power, directed its energies as much to support the interests of the crown as to punish covert dissenters from the faith. The disenfranchisement of Jews and their eventual expulsion in 1492 were undertaken quite as much to bring vast quantities of confiscated wealth to the royal treasury as to purge the religious community.

At the end of the century the consolidated Spanish monarchy rounded out its territories by new conquests and capped its successes with world-wide explorations. In 1492 the capitulation of the kingdom of Granada to the Catholic monarchs finally completed, after nearly eight hundred years, the reconquest of the peninsula from
the Moslems. Although the subjugated Moslems were to suffer a fate similar to that of the Jews, the first victims of this victory were Ferdinand's Christian neighbors. By 1512 he had occupied and annexed the portion of the kingdom of Navarre south of the Pyrenees, thus bringing all of the peninsula, except Portugal, under his sway.

While waiting for the fall of Granada in 1492, however, their Catholic majesties were approached by a Genoese ship captain with a plan for sailing across the Atlantic to the Orient. Apparently attracted by the personality of Christopher Columbus, and certainly jealous of the Portuguese and their African route to the East, Isabella backed an expedition that set sail August 3, 1492, under the aegis of Castile. On March 15, 1493, Columbus returned triumphant to announce a golden age for Spain and, although he did not know it, to give her the keys to a fabulous new world.

France

Bled by half a hundred years of war, France, at the opening of the fifteenth century, was being drained of her last remaining energies by a scandalous court and a notoriously corrupt administration. The king, Charles VI (1380–1422), was mad; and his brother, the duke of Orléans, as well as his uncles the dukes of Burgundy and Berry and his cousin the duke of Anjou, all vied for his power and wealth. The treacherous assassination of the duke of Orléans by his cousin the duke of Burgundy plunged the country into civil war just as it faced a new onslaught by the young and dashing Henry V of England, who hoped to make good his claims to the crown of France.

Crossing the channel in 1415, Henry V met the French
at Agincourt. The English forces were few but formidable, and the French nobles, remembering nothing from the debacles of Crécy or Poitiers, constituted an anachronistic mediaeval host. The lightly armored English, although outnumbered by five or six to one, proved superior, thanks to their organization and their archers. As the heavily armored French nobles attempted to charge across a wet plowed field, the English slaughtered over seven thousand at a cost to themselves of fewer than five hundred casualties. France was stunned, but the worst had not yet happened. While Henry occupied Normandy, the duke of Burgundy seized the French king and his government and, in 1420, in return for vast tracts ceded to himself, signed the Treaty of Troyes recognizing Henry V of England as Charles VI’s heir to the throne of France.

The Dauphin, Charles, refused to accept either the treaty or his disinheritance and made good his escape from Paris to set up a rival government at Bourges. Although the young Charles was a far from promising prince, he managed to establish a semblance of authority in the south and acquired a certain popularity, perhaps because of his very weakness. With the English and their Burgundian allies in firm control north of the Loire, desultory war continued until both Henry V and Charles VI died in 1422, leaving Henry’s infant son, Henry VI of England, the legal heir to the throne of France.

In October, 1428, the English mounted a major offensive against the city of Orléans in an effort to break the defensive line of the Loire protecting the southern bastion of the Dauphin. In February, 1429, when Orléans was nearing surrender and Charles’s cause seemed lost, deliverance arrived in the person of Joan of Arc. A farm-
er’s daughter from Domrémy, near the northeastern boundary of Lorraine, she had heard “voices” since childhood and had developed a local reputation for piety, prophecy, and healing. Passionately in love with France, she became obsessed with the need to expel the English and have the Dauphin crowned at Reims. By sheer obstinacy reinforced with awesome piety, Joan succeeded in persuading a local officer to take her to the Dauphin’s court at Bourges. There she identified Charles, who had been disguised to test her special powers, and impressed his advisers and an ecclesiastical commission sufficiently to win permission to join the forces being mustered for the relief of Orléans. Although the claims that Joan displayed military genius in lifting the siege are quite groundless, she certainly contributed to the victory by injecting confidence into the downhearted French. Joan’s appearance at Orléans was clearly the turning point; and when the English withdrew in confusion, allowing the Dauphin’s forces to seize the initiative, she became the heroine of France.

Next, exploiting all her new prestige, Joan persuaded the Dauphin to go to Reims for the traditional coronation ceremony in the great cathedral of St. Remy. Although northern France was still in English hands, the French procession encountered slight resistance, and on July 17, 1429, the Dauphin, accompanied by Joan, was duly crowned Charles VII. Ten months later, in a minor skirmish, Joan was captured by the Burgundians and turned over first to the English and then to the church, to be tried for heresy. Charles made no effort on her behalf, and the trial dragged on to its inevitable and tragic denouement in her execution at the stake in Rouen on May 30, 1431. Joan’s irreducible and irresistible simplicity
has made her one of the great heroines of history, just as
her devotion and achievements have made her the patron
saint of France. Thanks to her, Charles had not only been
crowned, but he had also been transformed from a puny
do-nothing into a purposeful monarch; and the French
had been galvanized into a nation conscious of its destiny
and devoted to its king.

As Charles began to press the war, the duke of Bur-
gundy read the signs, deserted his English allies, and
made peace with his rightful king. This tipped the scales,
enabling Charles to retake Paris, Rouen, Cherbourg, and
Bordeaux, so that by 1453 only Calais remained in Eng-
lish hands. The fighting ceased, and without treaty or
ceremony the Hundred Years' War finally ground to an
end. Depopulated and disorganized, France lay in ruins;
but the French had emerged victorious. Not only had her
territory been liberated and her people's morale restored,
but her monarch, sanctified by Joan's revival of the medi-
aeval mystique of kingship, was able to lead the nation,
reinvigorated by her evocation of a new patriotism,
toward recovery and the foundation of a vigorous national
monarchy.

In the course of his long reign (1422-1461), Charles
and his able advisers succeeded in developing and trans-
forming the royal institutions in the direction of greater
administrative independence from, and authority over,
the feudal elements of the realm. Fundamental to the
whole program was the laying down of a modern finan-
cial base. The crown established its permanent right to
"extraordinary" revenues, to the continuation in peace-
time of the special taxes which had been exacted to
finance the war. Thus, to the king's traditional "ordinary"
revenues from royal estates and customary taxes were
added the gabelle on salt, the aide on sales, and most significant, the taille on land or hearths—all transformed into annual levies. With such impressive new resources, Charles was able to create a standing army. Through a series of military ordinances issued between 1439 and 1451, he suppressed the unruly free companies which had wreaked such havoc during the Hundred Years’ War and arrogated to himself the exclusive right of raising troops. By creating a professional officer corps of nobles to command a strictly disciplined army stationed in permanent provincial garrisons, the king was able to put down uprisings and bring to heel such grandees as the dukes of Bourbon, Orléans, and Alençon. Even the church felt the impact of the royal power. By the Pragmatic Sanction, promulgated at Bourges in 1438, the king had subordinated papal authority and revenue to his control and had made himself virtual head of the church in France.

Impressive as his accomplishments were, Charles VII left many unresolved and urgent problems to his son and successor, Louis XI (1461–1483). Tagged the “Spider King” by history, Louis was a strange, neurotic personality, treacherous, deceitful, and cruel, but single-minded and tenacious in his devotion to the monarchy he had inherited. Sometimes mistakenly described as “modern,” he was in fact as mediaeval as his contemporaries, but of a bourgeois rather than an aristocratic turn of mind.

Delighted at the news of his father’s death and his own consequent succession, Louis rushed to Paris and threw himself into the business of being king. More than any of his predecessors, he based his power on the support of his towns, particularly Paris, and avoided fighting for anything he could buy. Allegedly, his passion for bribery
extended to attempts to buy the intervention of saints through lavish votive offerings. His chief opponents and bitterest enemies were, inevitably, the great nobles, who in 1465 formed the League of the Public Weal to defend their threatened interests. If they failed ultimately to subordinate the monarchy to their control, largely through lack of leadership and discipline, they nevertheless made such inroads against the king's authority that it took Louis years to recover from their insubordination and repeated armed attacks. Gradually, however, he brought these princely antagonists under control. One by one, the dukes of Brittany, Anjou, and Maine and the counts of Armagnac and Foix were either eliminated or subjugated and their fiefs and appanages returned to royal jurisdiction, until only Charles of Burgundy remained in open defiance of the crown.

Although Louis eventually manipulated the downfall of this last among his great rivals, he did so at the cost of creating still other problems. Having formed a coalition with the Empire and the Swiss, the king brought the contumacious duke to defeat and death in 1477; but at this moment of apparent triumph Louis saw his ally, the wily Emperor Maximilian, make off with Charles's daughter Mary and the bulk of the Burgundian inheritance. The obvious menace this marriage created for the king of France was compounded by still another wedding, that of Ferdinand and Isabella. That the first would open a bitter rivalry with the Hapsburgs was understood by everyone, but no one dreamed that the newly united Spain was also destined to become a possession of the Hapsburgs, and therefore, no one foresaw the full consequences for the French.

In spite of his failure to prevent the Spanish union,
Louis proved himself a remarkably successful king. Having consolidated the great fiefs of the monarchy, he reduced the towns and cities to subservience. By transforming municipal officers into royal agents, he vastly increased the size and efficiency of his bureaucracy and succeeded in quadrupling his revenues. Thus, by working with the wealthy bourgeois to maintain order, revive business, and restore prosperity, he managed to win their support while he was increasing their tax load by fiscal innovations. Altogether, Louis XI made remarkable progress toward the centralization of the royal administration and the development of the absolute authority of the king.

Under his successors, Charles VIII (1483–1498) and Louis XII (1498–1515), the consolidation of the royal powers continued. The conseil du roi, composed of the chief administrative officers of the realm, gradually absorbed such traditional prerogatives of the old estates, or provincial assemblies, as the right to impose taxes or name a regent. The estates-general, representing the entire kingdom, were summoned less and less frequently; and where popular support was needed, the crown resorted increasingly to the more tractable provincial estates, such as those in Languedoc and Brittany. Similarly, the grand conseil, which included princes as well as bureaucrats, also displaced the estates as a judicial body and became a sort of supreme court by extending its jurisdiction to all cases of special interest to the king and making its judgements immune to appeal. At the same time the provincial courts, or parlements,_staffed by bourgeois lawyers, not only survived but actually gained in authority. Thus, as the bureaucratic power of the absolute monarchy expanded at the expense of tradi-
tional institutions, notably the estates-general, certain local, even semi-autonomous, agencies were developed by royal support, creating the peculiar relationship of local government to the central administration which was to become a principal characteristic of the ancien régime.

Both Charles VIII and Louis XII nourished dreams of military glory, and both inherited claims to the kingdom of Naples from their Angevin ancestors. With this lure added to the traditional fantasy of liberating Constantinople from the infidel and restoring its Christian empire, Charles VIII invaded Italy in 1494. As might have been expected, his attack on Naples brought the Spanish sovereigns into the struggle in support, not merely of their Aragonese cousin (the king of Naples), but in defense of their own very active interests in western Mediterranean trade. In addition, but less predictably, the Hapsburgs joined what thus became a formidable—and ultimately successful—military coalition striving for control of the Italian peninsula. To some, this confused thirty-five-year struggle has seemed to mark the beginning of modern “international” politics. Domination, as Lord Acton pointed out, became a reigning motive in European history, for which a monarch would sacrifice all the resources of his kingdom. The new national states, unwilling to tolerate either limitations on their own ambitions or the fulfillment of those of their neighbors, lived in a condition of internecine competition for conquest and survival, nowhere more deadly than on the peninsula of Italy.

*England*

Like France and Spain, England at the beginning of the fifteenth century was divided and weak, but in spite
of disasters and disorders, she managed to emerge strong and united. In this island kingdom, however, where the monarchy could not justify a standing army for self-defense, the mediaeval parliament retained control of revenues and legislation. Although the kings did gain great strength, they never became as autocratic as their rivals on the Continent. Furthermore, it must be remembered that once shorn of her continental possessions, as she was after mid-century, England was much smaller, less populous, and therefore poorer than either France or Spain. Until long after the opening of the Atlantic, she remained on the periphery of European trade, culture, and even politics. But her later importance as a world leader makes the events of this, her formative period, of utmost interest.

Henry of Lancaster, having deposed the last of the Plantagenets, justified his seizure of the throne by claims based on inheritance, conquest, and parliamentary support; but the struggle between the new Henry IV (1399–1413) and his nobles did not cease with his coronation. In practice, this meant that the royal council continued to exercise authority, while the burghers and gentry worked in Parliament to restrain and direct royal spending. Not feeling sufficiently secure to challenge this opposition by imposing basic reforms on governmental procedures, Henry IV was forced to cut expenses. To this end he let the war with France lapse, thus dissembling rather than abandoning his ambitions, and thereby merely delaying the inevitable disaster.

The young Henry V (1413–1422) dazzled the English with his announcement to the French that he intended to claim their throne and make good his promise to lead a crusade to “build again the walls of Jerusalem.” In
response to Henry's appeal to the emerging national consciousness of his subjects, the nobles put aside political quarrels, the burghers forgot economic problems, and the country united in preparation for the impending war. At the same time, with unprecedented diplomatic skill Henry kept the Burgundians and the Emperor friendly and English trade safe. In a lightning invasion, he nearly annihilated the French nobility at Agincourt, married the French Princess Catherine, and had himself declared heir to the throne of France. When he suddenly died of camp fever near Paris, while still attempting to make good his claims after seven years of struggle, Henry V had raised English prestige on the Continent but had notably failed to contribute to the development of effective government at home.

His nine-month-old son was proclaimed Henry VI of England in 1422 and two months later, following the death of his maternal grandfather, Charles VI, was recognized as king of France as well. As Henry approached maturity, however, it became apparent that he had inherited from his French grandfather not only his crown but his insanity as well. Throughout his reign, the fortunes of England declined abroad as rapidly as those of the throne did at home. When, by 1453, the English were finally expelled from all of France except Calais, they seemed to repatriate all the strife and disorder they had sown abroad, with the demented king's rapacious uncles and cousins conniving and contending with the royal council and the Parliament and unleashing anarchy throughout the land.

Many of England's difficulties were created by social and economic changes. Ancient institutions founded on reciprocal services and loyalties had become anachronis-
tic in the new secular and mercenary age. Attempts to adapt the traditional institutions ended by producing what has been called “bastard feudalism.” The monarchy was reduced to using tax money to pay the great nobles vast sums, ostensibly for the military services of their “companies” but in reality as bribes for their “support.” Thus enabled to reach beyond their fiefs to hire enough retainers and troops to challenge the authority of the crown itself, the magnates developed into English counterparts of the ricos hombres in Spain, the appanage lords in France, and the independent princes in Germany and Italy. The basis of this new power was the reciprocal relationship between the lords and their retainers, formalized in contracts by which the former promised to defend or “maintain” the interests of the latter in litigation—that is, to overawe even royal courts by appearing in force at the head of their retainers—in return for which the same retainers agreed to wear the lords’ livery and serve them upon their summons.

In England, where the lack of a standing army left the king dependent on feudal levies for military support, this practice of “livery and maintenance,” as it was called, threatened the very existence of public law and order. The defeat in France coupled with misgovernment at court robbed the monarchy of all confidence and respect. Throughout the period, contemporaries appealed for reform, or more “abundant government,” as from place to place popular discontent grew into open revolt. In 1450 rebellious peasants captured the city of London, and for some time no one seemed able or willing to take the lead in restoring order.

The stage was set for civil war. The traditional rivalry among the king’s own relatives for control of the council
deteriorated into a naked contest for the throne; and the House of York opened a campaign to supplant the Lancastrian line by advancing legal claims to the royal inheritance. Then, in 1455, two years after the expulsion of the English from France had flooded England with "companies" of unemployed mercenaries, both sides took to arms. Virtually all the nobles joined one faction or the other, not to uphold constitutional principles, but to further private feuds and interests. Though the middle and lower classes remained largely indifferent and inactive, these deadly Wars of the Roses, as they have traditionally been called, dragged on for thirty years.

Edward, duke of York, finally brought temporary order out of the endemic chaos by deposing Henry VI and proclaiming himself king. As Edward IV (1461–1483), he was able to restore a degree of royal authority and financial solvency and to deal successfully with several Lancastrian uprisings, one of which briefly restored Henry VI in 1471. The reconstruction begun by this Yorkist king was terminated by his death in 1483, and England was plunged once again into civil war. Edward's twelve-year-old son sat briefly on the throne as Edward V, until his shrewd but neurotic uncle, the duke of Gloucester, consigned him and his brother to the Tower of London. Then, having seized the crown as Richard III (1483–1485), the usurper—who was immortalized by Shakespeare as an archetypal monster and tyrant but who has been somewhat exonerated by modern scholars—succeeded in raising more opposition than support. The widely accepted charge that he had had the little princes murdered roused dissident elements to rally around the latest Lancastrian claimant, Henry Tudor, duke of Richmond. With the defeat and death of
Richard on Bosworth Field in 1485, Henry brought the House of York and the Wars of the Roses to an end.

Henry VII (1485–1509), the able if little-known victor, founded the new Tudor dynasty and began the restoration and transformation of the monarchy. To strengthen his political position, he married Elizabeth, eldest daughter of Edward IV, and to symbolize the significance of this union of the Lancastrian and Yorkist factions, he had her crowned in a rich and solemn ceremony. In time he gained still more prestige by marrying his eldest son to Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella, and his daughter Margaret to James IV of Scotland. In spite of these brilliant foreign marriages, Henry still had to suppress repeated factional attempts to undermine his position at home.

Although England's once powerful medieval monarchy appeared to be disintegrating, much of its bureaucratic institutional machinery still existed in a moribund condition. To bring the institutions back to vigorous life, the Tudors discovered, they had only to reassert the personal authority that had made all medieval prerogative effective. Moreover, since the general population had suffered relatively little loss of property during the civil disorders, the nation needed only peace and secure government to flourish once again.

Henry VII's most remarkable achievement was his reorganization of the royal finances. He assiduously milked all the traditional sources of the crown—royal income, customs duties, feudal dues, and ecclesiastical revenues—while keeping a close check on government expenditure. But no king of the time, not even the frugal Henry, could hope to "live on his own," and he was forced to develop new expedients. One that was to cause
bitter resentment was the shameless exploitation of his right to impose fines and grant pardons for the slightest misdemeanors or "dead letter" crimes. In addition to seeking new sources of revenue by such dubious means, he also strove to reduce expenses both by improving methods of accounting and by cutting unnecessary outlay, particularly for military forces on land and sea.

To the remarkable feat of refinancing the monarchy without seriously increasing fiscal exactions from the populace, Henry VII added the inspired accomplishment of making Parliament a cooperative, if not complaisant, partner of the crown. Further, he cultivated the support and loyalty of the commercial elements of the realm by promoting prosperity and increasing foreign trade. But he kept the reins of government firmly in his own grasp. His chief administrative instrument, the royal council, was composed of the great officers of state and household ministers who enforced the ordinance, supervised finances, and conducted embassies abroad. This council, in some ways resembling a modern cabinet, also began to sit regularly as a high court of virtually unlimited authority—the English counterpart of the Audiencia in Castile and the judicial section of the conseil du roi in France. Known as the Court of Star Chamber, because of its meeting place, it acquired an awesome reputation for dealing effectively with "over-mighty subjects." Various other sub-bodies, with special duties, gradually took on the appearance of separate institutions, but such definition was slow and never absolute. The whole growth of the administration, always dictated by convenience, represented the gradual hardening of expedients into precedents and the proliferation of an unpremeditated system.
Summary

In the fifteenth century, two great new political phenomena almost completely transformed the political life of western and west-central Europe. Both centralized administration and national consciousness emerged with the development of new states. The one gave sinew and the other spirit of these evolving monarchies, enabling their kings and princes to establish dynasties and pursue territorial consolidation with the services of trained bureaucrats and disciplined armies, as well as with the enthusiastic support of that new element “the people.” A kind of national union under popular dynasties was achieved, not only in Spain, France, and England, but also in Burgundy and regions of Italy and Germany. Most surviving feudal magnates had to submit to the new sovereigns, although a few, such as the Bourbons in France and the bishops of Durham in England, managed to preserve substantial elements of independence. The ordinary nobles, however, lost purpose as well as power while the bourgeois, making tremendous gains in status and self-confidence, increasingly replaced them in royal administration. It was the monarchs, however, who made the greatest gains and whose appetite for power increased the most. Thus, during the fifteenth century a great deal had been done to expand the jurisdiction as well as increase the authority of monarchical government on all levels, but gargantuan tasks remained for the future builders of the modern state. In western and west-central Europe the ultimate triumph of the prince and raison d'état over the feudal lords and chivalry was by 1500 inevitable though still incomplete.