The rivalry of France and England.

As we approach the middle of the eighteenth century it becomes plain that the struggle which Louis XIV. inaugurated, with the object of making France supreme in Europe, had ended in failure. The remedy which William III. of England had proposed in order to meet this aspiration—the alliance, namely, of England, the Dutch, and Austria—had produced the desired effect, and the Continent could at last afford to forget its terror of the French name, for the French armies had been defeated and French aggression hurled back. But in spite of disasters on the Continent, and perhaps because of them, French colonial expansion went on through the reign of Louis XV., and in North America and India was entering into ever sharper rivalry with England. Plainly the aim of the French was to compensate themselves for the failure of their European plans by the acquisition of an empire beyond the seas. The plan was natural enough, but, unfortunately, came in conflict with a similar purpose of the English. Accordingly, with the progress of the century the gaze of Frenchmen and Englishmen turned across the seas, and slowly the centre of interest, which in the long struggle of France for supremacy in Europe had been the Continent, shifted to the colonies.

England and Austria dissolve partnership.

Such change of interest necessarily involved a subtle change of international relationships in Europe. In measure as France withdrew from her aggression against her continental neighbors, she conciliated her ancient enemies, Austria and the Dutch; and in measure as she emphasized her colonial ambition, she aroused the increased hostility of England. Thus, by the gradual operation of circumstances, England and France had, toward the middle of the eighteenth century, been brought face to face to fight out the great question of supremacy in the colonial world; and in this colonial question Austria, the old ally of England against France, had no immediate interest. Was Austria or any other continental power likely, under the circumstances, to take part in the war?

Prussia sides with England, Austria with France.

The war between France and England which followed, called the Seven Years' War (1756–63), is properly the most important struggle of the century, for it determined whether America and India were to be French or English. But though the other European powers had no direct interest in the colonial question, they nevertheless participated in the Seven Years' War. That was owing to the circumstance that the German powers, Austria and Prussia, had a quarrel of their own to settle, and that by choosing sides in the French-English conflict, Prussia allying herself with England and Austria with France, they brought about a fusion of two distinct issues in a general war.

The Seven Years' War, 1756–63.

France made great sacrifices in the Seven Years' War to maintain her position. She sent an army over the Rhine to coöperate with the Austrians against the Prussians and the English, and she prepared to defend herself in America, in India, and on the sea. Unfortunately, she was governed by an ignorant and vicious king, who was too feeble to persist in any policy, and who was no better than the puppet of a company of worthless courtiers and favorites. The real direction of French affairs during the war lay in the hands of the king's mistress, Madame de Pompadour, who never had an inkling of the real significance of the struggle.

Pitt, captain of England.

While government was thus travestied in France, the power in England fell into the hands of the capable and fiery William Pitt, known in history as the Great Commoner. His ministry lasted four memorable years (1757–61), during which time he organized the resources of the country as no one had ever organized them before. Fleets and armies were sent forth under the stimulus of the proud conviction that now or never England must establish her colonial supremacy. Under these circumstances victory

necessarily fell to the English. The French army in Germany was badly beaten by Frederick the Great at Rossbach (1757), and later held in effective check by an Anglo-Hanoverian force under Ferdinand of Brunswick. But the most signal advantages of the English were won, as Pitt intended, not in Europe but on the sea and in the colonies. First, the French were driven from the basin of the Ohio (1758).[1] In the next year Wolfe's heroic capture of Quebec secured the course of the St. Lawrence, and therewith completed the conquest of Canada. Furthermore, in India the celebrated Lord Clive (victory of Plassey, 1757) crowded out the French and established the English influence, while the great maritime victories (1759) of Lagos and Quiberon annihilated the French fleet and gave England absolute control of the sea.

George III., 1760–1820.

In the year 1760, while the war was at its height, George II. died, and was succeeded by his grandson, George III. (1760–1820). George III. had one leading idea, which was to regain for himself the place in the government recently usurped by the Parliament. So completely was he taken up with this plan that the war had only a secondary interest for him. He therefore took advantage of a division in the cabinet to dismiss Pitt, who was identified with the war, from office (1761), and hotly supported Lord Bute, who succeeded to Pitt's position, in his efforts for peace. Although the English negotiators, in their haste to have done, sacrificed some important English interests, the victories of Pitt spoke for themselves. By the Peace of Paris (February 10, 1763) England acquired from France Canada and the territory east of the Mississippi River, and received the recognition of her exclusive domination in India.

Peace of Paris, 1763.

[1] The French had claimed the whole Mississippi basin, and in order to shut out the English they had built a fort on the upper Ohio. In 1755 General Braddock was sent out to destroy the French fort, but refusing to be guided by the advice of the Virginian officer, George Washington, was badly beaten. When the French fort was finally taken, it was rebaptized Pittsburg, in honor of England's great minister.

The American Revolution, 1776.

If the Seven Years' War is England's greatest triumph, she was visited soon afterward with her severest calamity. In the year 1765 the British Parliament levied a tax upon the American colonies called the Stamp Act. When it became known that the tax aroused discontent, it was wisely withdrawn; but at the same time the principle was asserted and proclaimed that the British Parliament had the right to tax the colonies. As the Americans would not agree that they could be taxed by a body in which they were not represented, friction grew apace and soon led to mob violence. The British ministry, which was under the influence of an ambitious and obstinate king, resorted to military force, and the answer of the Americans to this measure was the resolution to revolt (Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776). In 1778 the colonists, through their agent, Benjamin Franklin, made an alliance with France, and from this time on the English were hard pressed by land and sea. Finally, the surrender of Yorktown (1781) to the American hero of the war, George Washington, disposed the mother-country to peace. In the Peace of Versailles (1783) England made France a few unimportant colonial concessions, but the really memorable feature of the peace was the recognition of the independence of the revolted English colonies under the name of the United States of America.

The Peace of Versailles, 1783.

Ireland gets Home Rule, only to have it withdrawn.

This American success revived political agitation in Ireland. We have seen how after the battle of the Boyne (1690) the Irish were literally trampled in the dust. The loss of their land and the proscription of their faith were not their only miseries, for they were continually exposed to the insults of a minority of Protestant settlers, who ruled the island by means of a misnamed Irish Parliament. But even this Protestant assembly, from which the Catholic majority was rigorously excluded, enjoyed no independence, since it could pass no act of which the British Privy Council at

London did not approve. A movement was now set on foot to free the local legislature from the hateful English supervision; and the British ministry, frightened by the American situation, so far yielded as to pass an act in favor of Irish Legislative Independence (1782). Unfortunately, the island was not pacified by this concession, for the religious animosities existing between the Catholic natives and the Protestant colonists blazed out in civil war. Riot, bloodshed, and massacre prevailed until the younger Pitt, son of the Great Commoner and Prime Minister of England, passed (1800) an Act of Union, which not only abolished the legislative independence lately granted, but suppressed the Irish Parliament altogether by incorporating it with the British Parliament at London. Since 1800 Ireland has been ruled in all respects from the English capital.

The Act of Union did not greatly occupy the public mind. For when it was passed, the French Revolution, though it had occupied the stage for more than a decade, was still holding the attention of England and all the world riveted upon it.

PART III

REVOLUTION AND DEMOCRACY