THE HAPSBURGS
TUESDAY 13 DECEMBER

There are three principal ways to create and keep an Empire: invent grand titles, have religion on your side, and marry well. The title Archduke of Austria, the one most famously associated with the Habsburgs, was invented in the 'Privilegium Maius', a 14th-century forgery initiated by Duke Rudolf IV of Austria. By the early 19c, Emperor Francis I of Austria used the titles of Emperor of Austria; King of Jerusalem, Hungary, Bohemia, Dalmatia, Croatia, Slavonia, Galicia and Lodomeria; Archduke of Austria; Duke of Lorraine, Salzburg, Würzburg, Franconia, Grand Duke of Cracow; Grand Prince of Transylvania; and Margrave of Upper and Lower Lusatia and Istria. Rulers of Germany also had the advantage of following in the footsteps of Charlemagne, who in 800 was crowned Holy Roman Emperor. From 1438, as rulers of Germany, the Hapsburgs were able to lay claim to that title and thus to the support of the Roman Catholic Church. They continued to hold the position from 1440 to 1740. Finally, the success of the Hapsburg dynasty was above all hugely aided by their adroitness in marriage. In 1437, Duke Albert V of Hapsburg married the daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund; in 1452 Frederick III of Hapsburg married Eleanor of Portugal; Frederick's son Maximilian married Mary of Burgundy; Maximilian's son Philip the Handsome married Joanna of Castile, heiress of most of Spain; Maximilian's granddaughter Mary married the son of the King of Hungary, leading to the establishment of the entire Austro-Hungarian Empire which persisted until 1918. When male Hapsburg heirs eventually failed to emerge, the result was the two World Wars of the 18c: the Wars of Spanish and Austrian Succession. The family included such immensely influential European rulers as Ferdinand of Aragon, Maximilian, Charles V, and Philip II and IV of Spain. What were the characteristics of Hapsburg rule, and was it for good or ill that so much of European power should be held in so few hands for so long?