

The threat that the dukes of Savoy might secure control of Geneva however provoked a backlash against them and the bishops they appointed: an opposing party of citizens countered Savoyard influence by securing support from the Swiss cities of Berne and Fribourg. In 1525 Duke Charles II intervened directly in Geneva and expelled the bishop's opponents, but in the following year they returned with aid from Berne and seized control of the city. Charles II now faced a critical situation. Geneva was slipping from his grasp and there was little he could do to recover it, for he was caught up in a new war that had just broken out in northern Italy between King Francis I of France and Charles V, the emperor and king of Spain. In 1525 Francis led yet another invasion of Italy through the Savoyard territories in a bid to reconquer Milan. It failed disastrously: his army was routed at Pavia and he himself was taken prisoner. Francis made peace, leaving Charles V master of the Italian peninsula. Duke Charles of Savoy now pursued a delicate balancing act between his two powerful neighbors, Francis I and Charles V, who was now securely in control of Milan. In this interval of peace the duke again turned his attention to Geneva, where the bishop's political situation was rapidly deteriorating. His opponents, backed by Berne, which had now adopted the Protestant Reformation, were encouraging Protestant preachers to stir up the populace against the clergy and against the bishop. Demands grew for the abolition of the Mass and the institution of Protestant worship. This Duke Charles could not tolerate, for it constituted a direct threat not only to the authority of the bishop but also to the Catholic faith, which as a Catholic ruler he believed he was bound to uphold. So late in 1535 he laid siege to Geneva, determined to bring its rebellious, heretical citizens to heel, and to conquer the city for himself.

Events now moved out of his control. The year 1536 would be catastrophic for the House of Savoy. In the space of three months Duke Charles saw his states overrun by French, Spanish and Swiss armies. For some time Francis I had been planning another invasion of Italy, aiming once again to conquer Milan from Charles V. This time however the French army would not bypass Turin, as it had in the past, but capture it and hold it. In January the invasion began. The French army quickly occupied all the Savoyard territories west of the Alps, and their capital Chambéry. Next to fall was Geneva, the city that might have become the new Savoyard capital. In February, as the French army was occupying Savoy and preparing to march into Piedmont, the Canton of Berne, now Francis I's ally against the Emperor and Duke Charles, defeated the Savoyard force besieging Geneva. The Bernese army then oc-