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Excerpt

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I. The Anglo-French Alliance, 1716–31

by

SIR RICHARD LODGE

THE Anglo-French alliance, adjusted by Stanhope and Dubois in October 1716, and expanded into a Triple alliance by the adhesion of the Dutch in January 1717, is quite as deserving to be called a “diplomatic revolution” as the Austro-French alliance of 1756, to which the term is usually applied. In a sense the earlier alliance was the more revolutionary of the two because it was more sudden and unanticipated. It had its origin in the common dynastic interests of the houses of Hanover and Orleans, both of which demanded the maintenance of the Utrecht settlement, and it is a curious fact that, though the Orleans influence declined in France with the death of the Regent in 1723, the final collapse of the alliance was deferred until the uncertainty as to the succession in France was removed by the birth of the Dauphin in 1729.

The Utrecht settlement, including the whole series of treaties which closed the Spanish Succession War, left, as such settlements are wont to do, a number of sore places behind. The avowed malcontents, Austria and Spain, resented the partition of the Spanish dominions which the two rulers, Charles VI and Philip V, had claimed as their undivided inheritance, but each had additional grievances. Austria was indignant at the severance of Sicily from Naples and at the Barrier treaty, which in many ways curtailed Austrian sovereignty in the Low Countries. To Spain the retention of Gibraltar by England was a running sore, and the intrusion of England into her colonial trade was almost equally resented. France was conscious that the Utrecht

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treaty was a fortunate escape from the threatened humiliation which had seemed inevitable in 1709 and 1710, and that sanguine hopes for the future might be based upon the seating of a Bourbon dynasty on the throne of Spain. On the other hand, French dignity had been insulted by the compulsory dismantling of Dunkirk and by the equally compulsory desertion of her Stuart guests, while she had no reason to welcome the exclusion of the Bourbons from Italy, or the Barrier deliberately erected against French aggression, or the territorial and commercial gains of England. Thus France must be reckoned among the malcontent powers, though exhaustion might make her for a time a passive malcontent. England, as the chief framer of the settlement, seemed to be the obvious champion of its maintenance, and Bolingbroke had taken very good care that English gains should be substantial. But even England had one bugbear. The Tory ministers, in defiance of Whig denunciations, had left a Bourbon on the throne of Spain. Even if adequate precautions had been taken, which was doubtful, against a future union of the French and Spanish kingdoms, there was every probability that the dynastic tie would, sooner or later, combine the two states in the pursuit of common aims, and that this would endanger both the European balance and the security of the Hanoverian dynasty in England. J. R. Seeley wrote an article for the first number of the *English Historical Review*, in which he contended that the later Family Compacts (in 1733, 1743 and 1761) fully justified the Whig condemnation of the treaty of Utrecht.

The Whig ministers who came into office on the accession of George I were perforce converted from critics into champions of the Utrecht treaty, because that treaty was, after the Act of Settlement, the strongest buttress of the Hanoverian succession. They had some

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hopes of co-operation from France when Orleans became Regent, but those hopes disappeared when France continued in the new reign to watch with obvious sympathy the Jacobite movements in England and Scotland. The ministers therefore had no alternative but to follow the familiar Williamite tradition of antagonism to France, and to seek the reconstruction of the Grand alliance which their Tory predecessors had shattered. Hence the Barrier treaty of 1715, which was designed to link Austria with the Maritime Powers in permanent hostility to France, and this was followed on 5 May 1716 by the conclusion of the treaty of Westminster with the Emperor. The English ministers also sought, for obvious reasons, to widen the split between France and Spain which had developed since Louis XIV had betrayed his willingness to abandon his grandson in 1709. Here also they achieved some success. The proud Spanish nobles, boastful that Philip V owed the retention of his crown rather to Castilian loyalty than to French arms, were eager to throw off the tutelage which had been tolerated only so long as French support had been indispensable. And when the regency fell to Orleans, whom Philip detested as a rival for the French succession and also as a personal enemy, the split between the two courts became a gulf. This enabled the English envoy, George Bubb, to conclude two commercial treaties with Alberoni in December 1715 and April 1716. There were, however, two snags in the way of the Whig policy. The Spanish Queen and her minister intended by these mercantile concessions to purchase English connivance for their ambitious designs in Italy. As such connivance would have involved a breach with Austria and a rupture of the renascent Grand alliance, England could not earn the purchase money, and without it the Bubb treaties were not likely to be more than paper promises. Another

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trouble was that the Emperor was turning his attention eastwards and was about to embark on another of those Turkish wars which had made Austria in the past such an unsatisfactory ally. At this juncture, in the autumn of 1716, when English prospects were rather murky, came those overtures from Dubois, which offered to convert France from an opponent into a supporter of the Utrecht settlement. Stanhope, in spite of his Whig prejudices, was quick to see the advantages of such a conversion, and hence arose the Triple alliance.

The most interesting, and from the English point of view the most successful, period of the Anglo-French alliance was from 1716 to 1720. In these years the co-operation of the two powers performed a double task. (1) It brought about that series of treaties which settled all the quarrels among the Baltic states, except that between Sweden and Russia in which Peter the Great would admit no mediation. (2) English diplomacy induced Charles VI to make peace with the Turks and to join France and England in what was called the Quadruple alliance. This combination crushed the Spanish attempt to make fundamental changes in the Utrecht settlement in Italy. The British fleet destroyed the nascent navy of Spain and a French army dismantled the fortresses and dockyards of Catalonia. Philip V had to dismiss Alberoni and to accept the terms of the Quadruple alliance, which had gratified the Emperor by allowing him to exchange Sardinia for Sicily. The bribe offered to Spain for its tardy adhesion was the recognition of the claim of Elizabeth Farnese's eldest son, Don Carlos, to succeed in Parma and Tuscany on the extinction of the male lines of the ruling dynasties. If Spain had yielded without fighting, Stanhope would have added Gibraltar to the bribe.

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This apparent triumph was almost fatal to the Anglo-French alliance, and ushered in a period (1720–4) in which it was in danger of dissolution. Public opinion in France was outraged by the employment of French troops against the grandson of Louis XIV, in whose cause France had fought for so many years, and France seemed to be degraded by playing the part of a cat's-paw for England. Stanhope's death transferred the control of foreign policy to the less capable hands of Townshend, who had had no share in recent achievements. Orleans and Dubois began to turn in the direction of that close alliance with Spain which England dreaded, and hoped to conciliate Spain by obtaining for her the cession of Gibraltar. The new English ministers discovered the negotiation, and could only minimize its dangers by sharing in it. The result was that in 1721 the Franco-Spanish treaty of 27 March was expanded on 13 June into a new Triple alliance between France, England and Spain, which undertook to put pressure upon Austria to accept the Spanish interpretation of the terms upon which Don Carlos was to succeed to Parma and Tuscany. At the instigation of France George I wrote his famous letter to Philip V in which he undertook to seek parliamentary approval for the cession of Gibraltar. These agreements mark a curious change in the attitude and in the balance of the Anglo-French alliance. In 1718 England and France, already acting together, induced Austria to join in imposing terms upon Spain. In 1721 France and Spain, already allied together, accept English assistance in inducing Austria to accept terms demanded by Spain. In 1721 France is as clearly the predominant partner as England had been from 1718 to 1720. Matters became worse when later in the year Orleans and Dubois, in complete secrecy, arranged a double marriage alliance with the court of Madrid.

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Louis XV was betrothed to the daughter of Philip V and Elizabeth Farnese, and Don Luis, the heir to the Spanish throne, was to marry a daughter of the Regent. The two prospective brides were exchanged on the frontier in January 1722, and later in that year there was yet another betrothal. Don Carlos was to marry a second daughter of Orleans, and she was to follow her sister to Spain. England, wholly unconsulted on these important matters, could only feign a pleasure which she did not feel. This apparent tightening of the Franco-Spanish alliance would probably have driven England to break away from France and to return to the traditional connection with Austria but for the friction caused by Charles VI's Ostend Company and for Hanoverian quarrels with the Emperor over affairs in Germany. The death of Orleans at the end of 1723 broke the dynastic tie which had brought England and France together in 1716, and the office of First Minister in France was transferred to the Duke of Bourbon, who had no quarrel with Philip V but rather the reverse. These changes seemed to bring France and Spain still closer together and thus increased the disquietude of England. The uneasiness of Anglo-French relations was reflected in the dilatory proceedings of the Congress of Cambay and in constant bickerings about the alleged failure of France to fulfil her promises with regard to Dunkirk. That the alliance survived 1724 was mainly due to the confusion in Europe caused by Philip V's dramatic abdication in January and his return to the throne some eight months later. During the interval the future attitude of Spain was so uncertain that deliberate diplomacy was almost impossible.

The year 1725 ushered in the third and final stage in the history of the Anglo-French alliance, and during the following six years it passed through sundry vicissitudes.

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When Elizabeth Farnese resumed control in the autumn of 1724, she was so disgusted with the inadequate support given to Spain by the allies of 1721, that she sent Ripperda to Vienna to suggest a direct reconciliation with the Emperor, who had plenty of grievances of his own against England and France. It is unlikely that anything would have come of this strange negotiation, whose secrecy was very imperfect, if Bourbon had not chosen this inauspicious moment to repudiate the marriage contract of 1721, to send back the young Infanta to Spain, and to hunt for an adult bride for Louis XV. This insult so exasperated Philip V and Elizabeth that they broke off diplomatic relations with France, returned the two Orleans princesses, one widowed and one unmarried, and authorized Ripperda to conclude a treaty with Austria upon terms which hitherto Spain had rejected with scorn. Thus what had seemed impossible had actually happened, and the two irreconcilable claimants, who had fought so obstinately against each other over the Spanish Succession, had not only settled their quarrel without mediation, but had actually become close allies. The conclusion of the treaties at Vienna on 30 April 1725, and the suspicion that behind their ostensible terms were secret and perilous agreements, so alarmed Bourbon and Townshend that the Anglo-French alliance, so recently on the verge of collapse, was solemnly renewed by the treaty of Hanover on 3 September 1725. This treaty, in its turn, produced the very danger which it was intended to provide against, and on 5 November Austria and Spain concluded the secret treaty, whose previous existence had been assumed by the Hanover allies. By this treaty the Austro-Spanish alliance was to be cemented by a double marriage. The two sons of Elizabeth Farnese were to marry at some future date two of the Emperor's

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daughters. If this meant, as Elizabeth Farnese hoped and as Ripperda assured her, that Don Carlos was to marry the eldest archduchess, and if she should inherit her father's dominions, a situation would be created in Europe which was almost equally alarming to England and to France.

I have called the treaty of Hanover in 1725 a "renewal" of the Anglo-French alliance. It might with at least equal accuracy be described as a new alliance, as it was made under altered conditions and with quite different purposes. It is impossible in a short summary to describe its later history.¹ All that can be done is to call attention to the dates of certain events which directly affected the alliance, to note the chief diplomatic turning-points, and to estimate the main purposes of the protagonists in the diplomatic turmoil. There was a brief period in which a "state of war" existed between England and Spain, but the actual hostilities were of minute proportions, and the general conflagration in Europe, which at one time seemed inevitable, never broke out.

The three events which directly affected the relations between England and France are as follows. In June 1726 Bourbon ceased to be First Minister and Fleury took his place with greater authority than the Duke had ever held. In August 1727 Morville, who shared with Bourbon the responsibility for breaking off the Spanish marriage, was removed from the French Foreign Office, and Chauvelin, the Garde des Sceaux, succeeded him. On 3 September 1729 Maria Leczynska, the wife of Louis XV, gave birth to a daughter. Each of these events weakened the Anglo-French alliance,

¹ I have attempted to do this in a Presidential Address to the Royal Historical Society on "The Treaty of Seville, 1729", printed in the Society's *Transactions*, Fourth Series, vol. xvi.