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Edward Barzillai Powley

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I

*The Failure of Diplomacy
Spring 1687 to October 2nd, 1688¹*

IT is well known that, at the close of the spring of 1687, the Dutch emissary, Everard Van Dyckvelt, having completed a brief, special mission² from the court of William, Prince of Orange, Stadholder of the United Provinces, to the court of James II, the father of William's consort Mary, heiress-presumptive to the English throne, returned to his master at the Hague; and the high significance attaching to the return of the ambassador from a mission which, from a purely diplomatic point of view, had been quite unnecessarily undertaken, and which has rightly been called an embassy "not to the government but to the opposition",³ has always been plain to students of Anglo-Dutch diplomacy of the months just preceding the Revolution of 1688. Indeed Mazure, the French historian of our Revolution, has declared with force and simplicity: "Le retour de Dyckvelt décida la fortune de Jacques II en fixant les résolutions du prince d'Orange".⁴ Broadly, the statement is true. It was immediately after this embassy that the opposed policies of London and the Hague hardened into an irreconcilable opposition. The conclusion of the embassy is therefore

¹ So far as this opening chapter is a matter of general and diplomatic history, it is based on the narratives of Burnet, Kennet, Echard, Rapin-Thoyras, Ralph, Oldmixon, Dalrymple, Mackintosh, Macaulay, Lingard, Ranke, Mazure, etc., supplemented, here and there, from the *Dictionary of National Biography*. But the general impression these authorities yield has been tested closely against certain accessible original materials—notably those printed in the Appendix of Dalrymple, the *Memoirs of James II* (for the worth of which see Ranke's valuable appendix) and *The Negotiations of the Count d'Avaux*. In turn, part of Dalrymple's Appendix has been tested against the (uncalendared) State Papers Domestic (King William's Chest) in the Public Record Office.

² He had not displaced Van Citters, the permanent Dutch representative in London, who filled a non-spectacular, but none the less useful, rôle at this time.

³ Macaulay, II, p. 245.

⁴ Mazure, II, p. 256.

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that appropriate place at which, for the purpose of such a work as the present, to attempt to capture the aims and to gauge the character of the baffled diplomacy which, in so short a space, was to provide for Europe the spectacle of a prince intervening by force in the domestic concerns of his father-in-law, prosecuting a design quite indistinguishable from an overt act of war.

An observer, far less capable than the Prince's shrewd emissary Dyckvelt, could not, in the England of early 1687, have failed to observe the effect of the King's domestic policy which had openly set itself the task of nullifying, by use of the royal prerogative, the action of the "Tests"; and Dyckvelt, who seems to have added to native shrewdness the gift of inspiring the confidence of others, had used the advantages of a privileged position to estimate the strength of the growing opposition to the King's policy, had employed his opportunities to gather from representative leaders their views of the developing situation, nay, had gone further and encouraged, as far as, and perhaps a little further than, diplomatic discretion allowed, those things in the conduct of the English opposition of which he knew his master approved. The visible evidence of the confidence he had inspired lay in certain letters he had taken with him to Holland, compromising communications from the leaders of those who had begun already to look to William and Mary in the hope of a deliverance to come. For example, in one such letter to the Prince, the Tory Nottingham declared, as he spoke of the factors of discontent, "he" (Dyckvelt) "has so fully informed himself of them that he can give you a very exact account of them: and of one thing especially he may assure you, and that is the universal concurrence of all Protestants in paying the utmost respect and duty to your Highness for you are the person on whom they found their hopes, as having already seen you a refuge to the miserable and a most eminent defender of their religion". Likewise, Danby expressed, in a similar missive, the opinion that, could a personal conference be arranged, "some overtures might be made which would be of some use" to the Prince's service.¹ Dyckvelt had also, of course, borne with him a letter from King James. To

¹ Dalrymple, App. pp. 183, 194, May 28 and 30 respectively.

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his son-in-law James wrote: "I have spoken to him"—Dyckvelt, that is—"of your private concerns of which he will give you an account as also of the public affairs here, and have spoken very (*sic*) to him of them, and told him (what I think) I have reason to expect from you for the good of the monarchy as well as our family".¹ Plainly the envoy's gathered impressions, the confidences he bore, his official unfolding of the royal will and sentiment of James called for the serious attention which they at once received.

Now no one will deny that the husband of the heiress-in-tail and the heiress herself-in-tail to a great estate may very properly watch with concern the administration of that property. To discredit the genuine sympathy of William and Mary at this time with the cause of English Protestantism and a very necessary, if less genuine, respect for her liberty would be unwarrantable; on the other hand, to believe that the concern of William was merely for a right settlement of the affairs of a country which, one day, he might be called upon through, or with, Mary to govern, is, in the light of the known international relations of the United Provinces, of which he was Stadholder, entirely impossible. He was seeking constantly to checkmate the French king. England by immediate alliance could have helped exceedingly his project; and, in any case, James's benevolence was necessary to the success of his design. Contrasted with that design nothing else mattered. England was important in her relation to his life scheme.

The Prince weighed his information. He answered James. He thanked His Majesty for his goodness in wishing to take care of his particular interest; but, while he disclaimed sympathy with persecution, he could not concur in what His Majesty asked of him in respect of the Tests. His letter (June 17/7)² really marks a crisis in the relation of the courts. Thereupon James complained to William of Dyckvelt's conduct during the embassy.³ Such an answer concerning the Tests implies that the return of Dyckvelt had convinced William that no alliance

¹ Dalrymple, App. p. 192, May 18.² *Ibid.* p. 184.³ *Ibid.* p. 185, June 16. For parallel evidence see d'Avaux, IV, p. 118 (June 12).

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could be obtained from an England ruled by King James, though it had left him undisturbed in a sense of his admitted family interest in English affairs. But the crucial importance of Dyckvelt's work was not reflected in the royal letter. William had been shown that religious sympathy and political foresight alike demanded that he should guardedly countenance the English opposition; above all, it familiarised him with the suggestion that armed 'intervention might place the resources of England under his sway.¹

But, almost certainly, no proposal of alliance could with success have been made, even had William answered otherwise about the Tests. Neutrality in the impending struggle suggested no dangers to James. The work which would fall on the redoubtable French armies would be great—great in proportion to the ambition of Louis's designs; as for the French navy, however fine or new its ships might be, James probably shared of it the unflattering opinion which his sailors had formed in the Third Dutch War; the Dutch might reasonably be expected to check any dangerous bid for power at sea should the French King care to make it. An ill wind to the Provinces might blow England good. Thrice in three decades the English nation had striven to destroy the ocean-borne trade of Holland (till Protestantism had stopped him, James had played a sailor's part); and, if a policy of neutrality would allow English merchants to profit by the harassing of Dutch trade, then, James may well have considered, so much the better for the national interests. If thus he argued—and his past career is the justification for the hypothesis—then, judging from some of the difficulties which faced his successor in 1701, he may be credited with correctly interpreting the national sentiment as far as it could be cleared of religious feeling and, equally, freed of the fear of tyranny. Admittedly James did not hold that estimate steadily before his eyes and, in not doing so, allowed Louis XIV to act on the congenial assumption that "good correspondence"—to use the current diplomatic term—with James could be cultivated

¹ Burnet credits Charles Mordaunt (third Earl of Peterborough) with making the proposal in 1686, and says that the Prince thought it "too romantic . . . to build upon it" (p. 762).

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through an obviously interested patronage. A Catholicism which would not listen to the voice of Rome, an inherent love of authority, both seeking with an uncertain touch means to their ends, sufficiently account for the wavering attitude of James which later events declare.¹

That summer (1687) James returned to his self-appointed religious task.² All that he forthwith did reacted to create a breach between his court and that of the Hague, and a great body of his people endured his paraded religion and concomitant arbitrary rule only because they turned towards Mary and her husband with an orientation which made a bond between a people and a court, though scarcely between a people and a people.

In November the pique which the attitude of his subjects had inspired in James must have deepened into resentment at the broadcast circulation of Pensionary Fagel's letter; for the letter revealed the Prince and Princess interfering, however deferentially, in the domestic affairs of England and publicly encouraging the passive recalcitrancy of James's people. One may speculate as to the probability that William knew at or about that time, anything of a plan to tamper with the birthright of Mary by annulling the Irish Act of Settlement,³ or wonder whether he was aware of the offer of Louis to provide James with troops "pour opprimer ses ennemis et se faire obéir de ses sujets"⁴ or of the concluded arrangement that Louis should pay

¹ For James's attitude see: *Memoirs of James II*, II, pp. 177 *et seq.*; also Mackintosh, pp. 373 *et seq.* and Seeley, *Growth of British Policy*, II. Mackintosh quotes a remark by James to Van Citters: "Vassal! Vassal de France! ... Sir, if Parliament enabled me, I would bring this Kingdom to a height of consideration, abroad and at home, never reached under any of my predecessors" (Van Citters, Aug. 27, 1686); Seeley relies much upon the *Memoirs*. Of the relations of James and Louis at an early stage, he writes (p. 285), "meanwhile there was no conspiracy but only a kind of general agreement, the habitual sympathy of relatives".

² D'Avaux alleges that, in "a letter written the second of February from London by a Jesuit of Liège which happened to be intercepted", the Jesuit makes the King to say "if he had known he had been a priest he would sooner have drawn back than suffered him to kiss his hand upon his knees: that he afterwards told him he was resolved to convert England or die a martyr... he looked upon himself as a true son of the Society". D'Avaux, IV, p. 122.

³ Dalrymple, App. p. 262; Barillon to Louis, Oct. 16, 1687.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 263; Barillon to Louis, Nov. 10, 1687.

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for the upkeep of some, at least, of the six English regiments then in Dutch pay, and which it was intended shortly to withdraw to England.¹ To decide that he knew of these matters would require a minute study of diplomatic materials and much shrewd guessing. In particular it would involve judgement upon Sunderland, whom the clever lampoon can scarcely be said to have libelled.

That Proteus ever acting in disguise,
That finished statesman intricately wise,
A second Machiavel, who soared above
The little ties of gratitude and love.²

Sunderland had certainly been of service to William on an earlier occasion.³ Bevil Skelton, James's representative in Paris, suspected him. Barillon, Louis's ambassador in London, was at that moment bidden to observe him closely. But Barillon saw no cause to distrust him⁴ and his purse continued to bulge with French gratifications.⁵ Suspicion would indeed lead one to fling a wide net. Sunderland's "dearest partner in greatness"—the Lady Anne—and James's envoy at the Hague, Skelton's successor, the Marquess d'Albeville (to give the "intriguing, pushing Irishman named White" his somehow acquired Austrian title),⁶ would hardly escape the toils.⁷

The first move for the recall of the regiments was taken by James in January 1687/8.⁸ When the full demands were made, William certainly hindered the return of all save the officers; and the affair entered upon the stage of proclamation and protest from which James was to obtain little satisfaction.⁹

In tracing thus far onward from the spring of 1687 the course of Anglo-Dutch diplomacy, the rival sets of interests—those of

¹ Dalrymple, App. p. 263; Barillon to Louis, Dec. 8, 1687, and preceding letters.

² Quoted in *D.N.B.* article, "Spencer, Robert; second Earl of Sunderland", from "Faction Displayed", State Poems 1716, IV, p. 90.

³ In 1680. See article cited, note 2.

⁴ Dalrymple, App. p. 271; Barillon to Louis, Jan. 5, 1688.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 280; Barillon to Louis, July 26, 1688.

⁶ Macaulay, II, 47. He was also an English baronet; *ibid.* pp. 242–3.

⁷ See article cited, note 2.

⁸ Dalrymple, App. p. 265; James to William, Jan. 17, 1688.

⁹ *London Gazette*, Mar. 15–19, 1687/8; Ap. 5–9, 1688; Dalrymple, App. pp. 266 *et seq.*

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William in respect to James, and of James in respect to William—have been suggested and thrown somewhat into contrast. Till January 1687/8 James's interests stood thus: A design to secure William's support for his domestic policy—which was the abolition of the Tests and the use, as far as he needed, of arbitrary rule—because the policy was, in an intelligible sense, a family affair and it was galling to James to reflect that his policy would not survive him. It was remarked that the latent hostility to Dutch trade was, for a time, suppressed. On the other hand, William's interests may be summarised as: A concern of the husband of the heiress-in-tail in the administration of a great estate; a desire to show conscientious sympathy with the cause of English Protestantism and a wish in some way to unite England and the Provinces of his Stadholdership against France. It has been strongly suggested that diplomacy, having reached an *impasse*, could hope to achieve nothing beyond the avoidance of a collision between those rival aims; but it has not, however, been suggested that the breaking-point had quite been reached. Indeed, one great consideration from the Prince's point of view (a consideration not so far stressed in this survey) dictated calculated inaction; for fate had, after all, loaded the dice in his favour. The accession of Mary was, in the fulness of time, reasonably certain; and that event would both yield aid to the English Protestants and give the desired pooling of Dutch and English resources against Louis as its firstfruits. William could afford to wait. Chance might indeed crown him without his stir.

On a sudden, however, as the month of January wore on, momentous gossipings flew abroad and it became impossible to doubt the rumours that Mary of Modena was with child.¹ Prospectively the interests of James were totally changed; prospectively William's support for the kingly domestic policy no longer remained a necessity; even the rivalry to Dutch trade might be more or less suffered to revive. As against William, James could expect in a little while to be so happily placed as to have no interest which he need strive at all actively to compass.

¹ Dalrymple, App. p. 273; Barillon to Louis, Jan. 5, 1688; Mackintosh, p. 202.

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On the other hand, the interests of William remained, in part, unchanged, in part, in all human likelihood, drastically altered. The desire to help the cause of English Protestantism persisted; the legal concern of the husband in the wife's once certain fortune was, there could be little doubt, to be taken away. As for the wish for an Anglo-Dutch alliance, that, it seemed, must become a proven vanity and therein a great hope count mockingly for naught.

It is by no means difficult to imagine how, in the suddenly altered circumstances, it was very hard, even for the phlegmatic William, to accept this impending disappointment of Mary's hopes and of his hopes in Mary. The temptation to clutch at the view that Mary remained still a need to the Protestantism of England doubtless presented a strong appeal to a Prince who could see through diplomacy no chance of satisfying his goodwill towards the Protestant party in England or to effect the alliance on which his anti-French design, his constantly nursed ambition, depended. What indeed was there left to him as an alternative to the surrender to brooding disappointment over a thwarted religious and family interest and a wrecked international aim? The single possible answer would stealthily re-suggest itself. If this English opposition, a leaven the strength of which Dyckvelt had laboured so carefully to ascertain, would go to the point of incipient rebellion, if there should be found to exist some downright evidence of sedition in that royal but none the less Protestant service, the navy of England, if (to William, the soldier, a possibly yet more appealing contingency) unequivocal assurances could be obtained that much gentry would pledge themselves to await only the display of his banner upon English soil to rise and to risk everything for their cause, such circumstances would admittedly rank as by no means negligible arguments to urge towards the pursuit of the daring, if unattractive course, the success of which would compass all that stood common to William's cause, as he still conceived it, and the Protestant constitutional desires of the English opposition. It is safe to conclude that it was at this time that the Prince, with a mind that can scarce have been attracted by so adventurous and plainly hazardous a notion as "intervention", finally

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habituated himself to the uncomfortable idea and forced himself to face the broad terms of the problem in warfare which would confront him, should he once settle upon the intervention design.

For several months the French Ambassador at the Hague, the Comte d'Avaux, had watched narrowly the signs of the Dutch naval activity. In the Prince's interference with the customs duties d'Avaux had suspected, as early as August 1687, unrevealed ends, and had reported "He has this affair very much at heart for it may facilitate some of his designs and especially the maintenance of good seamen".¹ A month later, the Frenchman had noted "The province of Holland was still employed in regulating the affairs relating to the farm of the duties of import and export, which have been levied with such rigour, after the liberty which the merchants had hitherto enjoyed of not paying them, that in the month of August, which is just elapsed, the receipt was augmented in Rotterdam six times more than usual and at Amsterdam ten times".² In November the ambassador had further declared that saltpetre and the best masts were unattainable in Dutch markets.³ D'Avaux's early observations in the month of January 1687/8 to the effect that the receivers of customs were required to give their March estimates, that the income was allocated to Admiralty supply, that from the Colleges of Admiralty⁴ had been requisitioned many 30–50 gunned ships (Maes-Rotterdam 4, Amsterdam 12, Zealand 2, Friesland 2, N. Holland 0), that William desired to avoid direct appeal to the Provinces, were of really important character.⁵

It is appropriate to observe that at the close of the year the Earl of Peterborough was put in command of a small Dutch squadron in the West Indies. "The object of this commission," says an authority, "has not been explained, though it has been suggested that it was 'to try the temper of the English colonies and their attachment to the reigning sovereign.' It is probable

¹ D'Avaux, IV, Aug. 7, 1687.² *Ibid.* Sept. 25, 1687.³ *Ibid.* Nov. 6, 1687.⁴ Five separate Boards of Admiralty provided and equipped the warships of the Provinces; see p. 172.⁵ D'Avaux, IV, Jan. 1, 2, 1688.

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that Mordaunt was instructed to sound Narbrough, who was in command of the English squadron, at that time engaged in an attempt to recover treasure from a Spanish wreck. The actual pretext was an intention 'to fish' for the treasure; but 'they were wholly unprovided to work the wreck', and after a few days, during which the two commanders met on friendly terms, Mordaunt's Dutch squadron took its departure and returned to Europe".¹ Peterborough remained with the Prince.

Now, had William, in the January of 1687/8, possessed adequate means for intervention—ready naval forces, transports and waiting soldiers—can it be said that he probably would have taken the daring course and tempted fortune? The question is useful as bringing to light an all-important consideration. William could not act as if his English interests alone counted. If a Franco-Dutch war, then already seen to be imminent, began at once by an attack of France upon the Provinces, the Stadholder would be fixed to Dutch soil and an English intervention scheme, which, in any case, a Dutchman might have stigmatised as a quixotic crusade, would become utterly unreasonable. But William had no sufficient forces available; and it is not likely that one so self-possessed, would, at that stage, have been stampeded into unreasoned precipitancy. The child was not yet born. Nor is it likely that the particular problem in warfare which the scheme of intervention had set before the Prince had been solved (if indeed it ever could be) to anything like his or his advisers' satisfaction. It was, however, only natural that henceforth William should anticipate the possible needs of an intervention policy. So he is found concentrating upon the task of preparing armaments and improving alliances which subserved the specific end. To ensure that any move by France should not quash the probable scheme, he went warily and kept up diplomatic appearances. The fact that Van Citters had apparently demanded 20 ships of England to help clear the Channel of Algerines is noted by d'Avaux for

¹ Laughton, *D.N.B.* article "Mordaunt, Charles, third Earl of Peterborough", using Charnock, *Biog. Nav.* III, p. 316, and Dartmouth MSS XI, 5, p. 136.