

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-02212-5 - A History of England: Principally in the Seventeenth  
Century, Volume 4

Leopold von Ranke

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## BOOK XVI.

THE LATER YEARS OF CHARLES II, 1675-1685.

WHIGS AND TORIES.

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NEITHER a republic nor an absolute monarchy was seriously contemplated in England at this period. There were still many men in whom the passions of the fanatics and republicans continued to work; but the general feeling of the nation was opposed to their return at any time to power. And Charles II could never flatter himself that he would acquire such an authority as Louis XIV possessed in France. For he had been restored by Parliament, and we have seen how Parliament, though at first devoted to his authority and allied with him, gradually took up a position of resistance.

The questions of the day were of a constitutional nature, and were concerned with determining the limits of the authority of the Crown and of the two Houses in accordance with the Parliamentary constitution; and it is precisely this question of limitation, at this time practically undetermined, that lends a new and general interest to affairs.

Parliament calls the King's ministers to account; the King, if the decision is contrary to his inclination, makes difficulties about dismissing them from his service.

Parliament lays claim to the control over the expenditure of the moneys granted by it; the King reserves the right of examining the account books himself, and judging about them.

The King has on the whole free scope, as he is not compelled to summon Parliament every year. He can at his will

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adjourn or dissolve it ; but the dissolution gives him a prospect of such unfavourable results that he recoils from it ; and the adjournment embitters men's tempers.

Parliament, by granting the crown insufficient revenues, has placed it under the necessity of seeking Parliamentary assistance, not only in very extraordinary cases, but in the ordinary course of things as well ; the King does not hesitate to emancipate himself, by means of foreign subsidies, from this duty which is to him the most burdensome of all.

Already Parliament in different cases has exercised a decided influence upon foreign affairs ; the King considers the main point of his prerogative to consist in determining with unconditional authority, his relations with foreign powers.

Parliament has accompanied the restoration of the Anglican Church with exclusive privileges, oppressive to every diverging opinion ; the King looks upon it as a right and duty to restrict these privileges.

Though we have seen how all these points of dispute originated in the circumstances and affairs of England, and so took their peculiar form, yet they have a general meaning which reaches beyond the persons concerned, their weaknesses, errors, and transgressions ; they are questions to a certain extent inevitable. For if monarchy is to have any meaning of its own, and otherwise it would be useless to the constitution, it cannot renounce the freedom of individual judgment, without which no one would choose to live. But on the other hand, a Parliament which once feels its power, will hardly reconcile itself to the necessity of remaining subordinate to an external will. The opposition lies in the nature of the two powers, each of which strives, in accordance with its inward impulse, after an authority which, if obtained, would destroy the freedom of action enjoyed by the other, and hamper its self-consciousness.

This became most strikingly apparent in the religious question. Without doubt Parliament was within its rights, to a greater degree even than it was aware, when it opposed the intrusive advance of Catholicism, by the restoration of which the monarchy hoped to establish once for all the royal supremacy. Charles II had now submitted, but near to him

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stood his brother, the heir to the throne, who adhered to the Catholic faith with unwavering zeal. Was the country calmly to submit to the dangers which the Established Church would run on the accession of a prince who held these views? Or should the heir to the monarchy allow Parliament to set him measure and limit in the most private and personal of all matters, his religion? Or if not, how were the complications, which might be expected, to be safely avoided?

But whilst the expectation of this great contest, in which the future of Great Britain was involved, filled the horizon, political action was at the same time excited day by day by continental relations and their changes.

The European war had taken another direction, now that a great continental alliance had come to the support of the Dutch. For Louis XIV this could not be in itself disagreeable, for it gave him the opportunity of returning to the most important of all his schemes, and the one which has had most effect upon posterity,—the extension of the French boundary on the East. He not only opposed to the forces of the allies, which were in themselves superior, his well-practised and well-commanded army, but he knew also how to occupy them on another side, by awakening enemies in their rear, Swedes, Poles, Hungarians, and Turks. Still even so he would with difficulty have resisted his opponents, if England had joined with them as Parliament continually demanded. To keep King Charles on their side, the French never wearied of representing to him that Parliament aimed at interfering in his government and overthrowing his ministers: must it not be, they urged, the chief maxim of a prince to carry out his will under all circumstances, and to maintain his ministers? for otherwise the next attack might be directed against himself. And if Charles II asked for subsidies, they were always inclined to consent, for French money, even in the time of war, could not be better employed than in neutralising the English Parliament<sup>1</sup>. But with all his submission to France, Charles II could not shut his eyes to his relations with the

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<sup>1</sup> Ruvigny, Jan. 27, 1675: 'Que les finances du roi ne pouvoient pas être mieux employées qu'à la destruction d'un puissant ennemi qui soutenoit tous les autres.'

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other European powers, and to the position which the English kingdom held in the world ; his financial necessities also perpetually awakened in him the desire to stand well with Parliament. He wavered, according to his custom, from one side to the other, as his advantage required. Whether he would follow this or that impulse, formed always one of the most important elements in determining the fate of Europe and the Parliamentary difficulties at home.

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## CHAPTER I.

### PARLIAMENT IN 1675. FORMATION OF NEW PARTIES.

THE French influence did not at first extend so far that King Charles would have allowed himself to be restrained from summoning Parliament. The French offers, even an autograph letter which Louis XIV wrote for that purpose<sup>1</sup>, had, this time, no effect upon him. For he could have no doubt that an understanding with Parliament, if it could be brought about without loss to the crown, was far preferable to a French alliance. Charles II said to the French ambassador, that he must give Parliament another trial, but that he would defend the outworks of the crown against all its attacks; he would not allow it to interfere either with his ministers or with the succession to the kingdom, or let it meddle with political matters<sup>2</sup>; he would never allow himself to be separated from the King of France: Parliament might still be very useful; should he see that nothing could be done with it, he would decide upon dissolution. On the 13th April, 1675, the fourteenth session of Parliament was opened.

The King had from the first determined on a change in the conduct of affairs. Buckingham had retired; Arlington fell into disfavour immediately after the first debates, in which

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<sup>1</sup> 'Tendre et pleine d'amitié'; such is Charles II's opinion: but Ruvigny, February 24, adds—'il est persuadé que les affaires seroient ruinées s'il éloignoit encore le parlement.'

<sup>2</sup> 'Que le parlement fasse aucune entreprise contre ses droits—parle d'alliance, de traités de succession, de paix, de guerre ou d'attaquer les ministres.' Ruvigny, March 3.

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his friends took up a factious position. The King no longer asked his advice, and no longer attended to him when he gave his opinion unasked.

The chief ground for this lay in the fact that Arlington's advice had led to the most serious complications, and the King was of opinion that he would not be able to do anything with Parliament, unless he avoided all Catholic tendencies. The man he now trusted was Thomas Osborne, Earl of Danby, whom he had raised to be Lord Treasurer, and who, in his administration of this office, in which he discovered unexpected financial resources, won his especial favour. But even in this, Danby became convinced that it was impossible to administer the state without agreement with the Commons, and this again could not be attained if their religious sentiments were resisted. Already beforehand he had planned the publication of a declaration against Catholics and Nonconformists, to which Arlington could never have consented; from the first he had been excluded from the discussions about it; besides Danby, only the old Presbyterian, Lauderdale took part in it. It was in accordance with this that the speech from the throne joined to the demand of subsidies for the restoration of the navy the most express assurances in favour of religious uniformity.

For only by this means was further progress considered possible. Thomas Osborne had been one of the chief opponents of Lord Chancellor Clarendon; as Lord Treasurer he returned, if not to Clarendon's system, at least to his principal ideas. He wished to attempt the union of the Anglican interest with the maintenance of the prerogative.

He himself belonged to a Royalist family, which in the civil wars had suffered great losses, and had never been indemnified for them; his wife was the granddaughter of the Lord Lindsay who perished fighting most bravely at the battle of Edgehill. He had, as it were, an inherited right to favour and advancement from the King. But he also neglected no means of advancing himself. When Buckingham rose into power he was one of his most zealous adherents; the Duke

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<sup>1</sup> Reresby (Memoirs 176) ascribes this also to Buckingham: they may, without knowing it, have co-operated.

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of York claims to have recommended him as Lord Treasurer<sup>1</sup>: still this did not keep him, when once he had entered upon his high office, from turning away with equal decision from both; he took up his position midway between the patron of the Dissenters and the head of the Catholics. Only by closely uniting the crown with the bishops and the Anglican gentry, to whom he himself belonged, did he see any possibility of forming a compact administrative power. He was a minister who could still prevail upon himself, in reality against his better judgment, to follow the King in his doubtful policy, and to be responsible for him in the embarrassments which it produced: adapting himself to circumstances, not particular in the choice of means, in his private life as little correct as most others, he still occupied himself with wide and comprehensive schemes, maintained them with perseverance, and even knew how to convert the King to them: Danby was of greater importance in the general development of English affairs than is usually supposed.

Early in the session a bill for security against disaffected persons was introduced, which perfectly expresses his sentiments<sup>1</sup>. According to it the declaration already imposed upon the clergy, to the effect that all resistance to the King and his officials was illegal, and that no attempt would be made to introduce any change into the government of Church and State, was now prescribed for lay officials also, and even for members of Parliament. It is easy to see what this involved. The laws enacting unconditional obedience in civil matters and uniformity in religion, would have been most closely united and permanently established; the Presbyterians, who had been carried in continually increasing numbers in chance elections, would have been obliged to retire from the Lower, and the Catholics from the Upper House; the power of the state would have been concentrated in the hands of the Anglicans; Parliament and Government would have been united into one single dominant party. Danby made it known, that in that case the government would make common cause with Parliament in foreign politics also.

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<sup>1</sup> The no resisting test. Parliamentary History iv. 715.



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England would have become united in the Anglican-Protestant interest. His friends said that he had been induced by the bishops to make these proposals, but the bishops declared that he himself had taken the initiative. If he succeeded he would become unassailable.

The immediate result of the reading of the bill in the Upper House, where it was first introduced, was an outcry of indignation. Lord Bristol exclaimed that it ought to be burnt. How entirely the claim of the Lords, that their right to a seat and a vote in Parliament was due to their birth, was abolished, if its exercise were to be made conditional upon an oath of this kind! Some other influential lords united with Bristol in a protest against the further progress of the bill. In spite of this it was taken into consideration by a committee of the whole House. Here many urgent objections were made to it. It was affirmed that the very nature of a limited monarchy subjected it to the necessary fear of resistance; for by this means the Prince was prevented from forming for himself a special interest in opposition to his people. Further it was affirmed that it belonged to the nature of a legislative power to take into consideration changes of government. There was a return to the doctrine of the Long Parliament, that a distinction exists between the king in theory and the king in practice, and the system of the Anglican Church, as well as the bishops' claim to a divine right, was attacked with a zeal which recalled those times. But as the bishops themselves possessed seats and votes, and numbered not a few adherents amongst the lay lords, and also had the authority of the government on their side, all these objections produced no particular effect<sup>1</sup>. Some changes were made in the resolutions: it was conceded that no one should be excluded from Parliament for refusing to take the oath; but what was substituted was little better, that those who refused the oath should be liable to a penalty of £500, and that for each session. Such an amendment could pacify no one.

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<sup>1</sup> Ruvigny, June 21: 'Les évêques étant joints avec plusieurs Seigneurs ont paru superieurs dans la chambre haute.'

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These resolutions contain the strongest manifestations of the Anglican and monarchical idea which had yet appeared. The King renounced his Catholic tendencies in contradiction to his brother, who declared himself opposed to the bill. Protestantism was to be the foundation of the government, but a Protestantism entirely royalist in politics; the theory of non-resistance which the Presbyterians rejected was to become the doctrine of the state, and was alone to grant full civil rights.

It lies in the nature of things that such a proposal should awaken the most active opposition. The French ambassador often alludes to a society of confederate lords to which Buckingham, Wharton, Ogle and Shaftesbury belonged; the last-named peer must be looked upon as its intellectual chief. In their opposition to the doctrine of non-resistance, they were the natural allies of the Presbyterians, whose leader was Lord Hollis: they may be looked upon as the first Whigs, although this term was not imported from Scotland till a few years later. They took up again the tendencies which they had formerly defended against Lord Chancellor Clarendon, and for the sake of which they had separated themselves from the Catholic-minded administration. Danby's policy was undoubtedly Protestant, but it bore an analogy to the exclusive privileges which in France and in the domains of the house of Austria were attached to the confession of Catholicism. These lords opposed the minister through personal dislike, and his policy through political conviction.

In the Upper House, as we have shown, they effected nothing; in the Lower House they had adherents, but it was thought that the bill, as it had passed in the Upper House, would also pass in the Commons, where the Cavaliers, who were on the Church side, were in the majority. What means of opposition existed?

Between the Upper and the Lower House a dispute broke out which made their co-operation impossible. It was generally supposed at the time that Shaftesbury, to avoid the danger, had purposely inflamed the quarrel. And it is true that those lords who opposed the bill set themselves, in the course of this dispute, against every possible reconciliation.