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Leopold von Ranke

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## BOOK XX.

WILLIAM III AND PARLIAMENT DURING THE WAR  
WITH FRANCE. 1690—1697.

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THE wish to throw the resources of England into the balance against the overwhelming power of Louis XIV was undoubtedly the original cause of the attack which William of Orange made on the throne of James. Resistance to Louis XIV had now become a European necessity; but it never could have been successful without the adhesion of Great Britain. The English gentry and people chafed under the intimate connexion between James II and France; they were, above all, eager to secure their Protestant and Parliamentary constitution against the assaults of a prince who deemed his prerogative to be above all laws, civil or ecclesiastical. But these motives, closely connected before, were fused in one when James II fled to France and accepted her support. All that William and the Parliament carried out in Great Britain—the change of government, the overthrow of their opponents—alike expressed hostility to France. The wish to stem the tide of foreign influences, on which it principally depended, became still more general; for it produced a more sharp-cut antagonism between the Catholic monarchy, to which Louis XIV had given unparalleled unity and energy, and the Protestant and Parliamentary constitution of England, the most powerful of the Germanic kingdoms, which obtained a wider development in a new career. Matters had now gone so far that she could take an important part in the great European struggle. The clash of discordant and destructive elements, contending for the mastery at home and abroad, has more than once threatened ruin to the national life of England. But her safety lay in the fact that the mighty foe, attacked by a great coalition, never in the whole course of the struggle had leisure to bring his full power to bear on her.

We now come back to the origin and causes of the general war.

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## CHAPTER I.

### FORMATION OF THE GRAND ALLIANCE. BEGINNING AND CHARACTER OF THE WAR.

WHEN William III came to England, he was leagued with the States-General and some few German princes for this one object; but in order to give the undertaking the desired direction, and to turn it against the preponderance of France, a far more comprehensive union had to be arranged.

And now again came up that condition of international policy which during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had especially ruled the course of politics—namely, the connexion between Spain and the Indies with the Netherlands on the one hand, and with South Italy and also Milan on the other. Since the time that the Spanish monarchy had ceased to menace the liberties of Europe, men had become familiar with this connexion. And now more than ever Spain, incessantly pressed by the ever-growing preponderance of France, saw that her safety lay in a close union with Holland and England, of old her stoutest enemies. The two representatives of the Spanish monarchy, Gastanaga, Governor of Brussels, and the envoy Ronquillo in London, welcomed with glad approval a proposal of which the effect would be the ruin of French influence in England. We have already mentioned the visits which Ronquillo, under cover of the utmost secrecy, paid to the Prince on his arrival at St. James's. In these visits the chief talk was of a great war with France. When the Brandenburg general Spaen arrived, people reckoned up the troops to be opposed to the French in the Netherlands. William, moreover, indicated that the participation of Spain

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was the indispensable condition of any undertaking<sup>1</sup>. He said he was as heartily Spanish as if he had been a Castilian; that he would ask no more from the Spanish crown than it could bear; but that its help they could not forego, considering the weight it would give to the affair. At the court of Madrid, in the midst of those manifold party movements which marked the days of Charles II, a man of spirit and determination, Count Oropesa, had become the leader in public affairs, and had abandoned those French sympathies, which had for some time prevailed, for a more friendly feeling towards the German line of the Austrian house, and towards the opponents of France. Would he then openly recognise an undertaking such as this of William III—an undertaking which attacked a legitimate sovereign, and one too who was a great champion of Catholicism? Would he be ready to make common cause with the King of England? Louis XIV still counted on the neutrality of the Spanish court, and even made proposals in that belief. But in the great crises of European history theological sympathies have generally but little weight, if they are opposed to interests. And so the Spaniards hit on the weak expedient of instructing their envoy to agree to nothing that would lead directly to the exclusion or overthrow of King James, while they still recognised William as King of England. But with such a neutrality as this Louis would have nothing to do. He had now declared war against Holland; but the advantages he hoped to win from the Dutch could only be fought for in the Spanish Netherlands. His determination to declare war was probably hastened by the fall of the French party in Spain; and this was again connected with unfortunate events (such as the death of the Queen Maria Louisa) which concerned him very closely. In April 1689 he declared war against Spain<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Ronquillo, Jan. 25, 1689: 'Ponderando en sus pocas palabras, quanto importaria, que V. M. hiziese algo, aunque fuesse poco, pues qualquier cosa daria pesso a la confederacion, como lo, que dexase de hazer, la destruyria; y que el havia prevenido el suplir nuestra falta, haziendo un mismo cuerpo de les fuerzas de V. M. y de las del señor Emperador, porque esto mirava tambien a la union de toda la augustissima casa.'

<sup>2</sup> Déclaration de guerre de Louis XIV, Roi de France, contre les Espagnols, du 15 Avril, 1689. Dumont vii. 2, p. 221.

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This was just such a state of things as had prevailed in the later years of the previous war; and this it was that principally affected the court of Vienna.

The Emperor had indignantly rejected the overtures for peace made him by Louis XIV after the fall of Philipsburg. But yet the court of Vienna felt many a scruple as to an alliance with William III, in spite of the friendly relations already subsisting between them. They found fault with him for not showing sufficient respect to the supreme head of the Empire in his dealings with the German princes. James II reminded the Emperor that his cause was the cause of all crowned heads. Above all, religious partisanship was aroused in behalf of the English Catholics. But all this clamour was silenced in the presence of political necessities. The war with the Turk was still in full course; and while this was going on, a stop could only be put to French aggrandisement by the help of Holland and England. The court of Vienna had ever deplored the preference for France shown by the Stuarts: it was impossible not to welcome with joy the change which put the helm of English power into the hands of a prince of opposite opinions. And now too the great question of the future came up above the horizon. Louis XIV upheld the pretensions of his Queen to the Spanish crown, in spite of her renunciation, which was still to all appearance valid; he even tried, through his influence with the German princes, to obtain for the Dauphin, for whom he upheld these pretensions, the dignity of King of the Romans. Had he succeeded, the house of Austria would, at one blow, have lost both the Empire and the Spanish throne. But, as experience showed, no combination save one based on the firm establishment of William on the English throne could defeat this design. Burgomaine, the Spanish ambassador, whom the Emperor Leopold I trusted more than he did his own ministers, declared that the English Revolution would produce a union between England and Holland, and that this must needs turn out to the advantage of the house of Austria. The Emperor would need subsidies for the war: these Holland could not provide; but he might certainly count on them from England, which for a long time past had suffered

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no exhaustion from war<sup>1</sup>. Hope, the Dutch ambassador, who was charged with the conduct of the negotiations at Vienna, undertook, as the conditions of the proposed alliance, to support an archduke as successor to the Empire, and to maintain the Austrian claim to the Spanish throne. But this would have been of small importance had nothing but the help of Holland been hereby secured: the fact that the Statholder of the Republic was also King of England first gave to this agreement a real value and a well-founded chance of success in the future. It was well understood that, unless the Emperor joined them, the sea-powers might carry on the war to a successful issue without troubling themselves about the interests of the house of Austria.

Thus through this question came together those two powers in the political world which were in themselves most utterly opposed. Resistance to the preponderance of France was their inner impulse towards union. William III was so deeply impressed with the need of an alliance with the Emperor that he advised the ambassadors to withdraw the demand for a certain number of troops to be equipped by Austria, if the court of Vienna hesitated to grant them. He desired to press the Emperor as little as the King of Spain: the consideration that both he and his affairs would gain from an alliance with these two courts, so ancient, so respected, and so legitimate, would by itself be of the greatest value to him. A treaty of alliance between the Emperor and the Republic was signed on the 12th of May, 1689. Before being accepted by the Republic it was sent over to England. William III assented to the treaty altogether as soon as the document, in which the Emperor recognised him as King of England, had been received. It might be inferred from this that a fresh alliance between England and Holland must have preceded it: but it was not so; in fact it came later, and was not even then carried through without difficulty. The old engagement that Holland, if attacked as she now was, might demand the help of English troops now no longer sufficed; the impending war

<sup>1</sup> Extract from the Hope Despatches, Feb. 1689. Lexington Papers, pp. 341 sqq.

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made a much closer union in policy and arms necessary. The Dutch thought they might herewith get some commercial advantage—some relaxation perhaps of the Navigation Act. But how hopelessly did they misunderstand the position of William in England if they thought to accomplish this through him! His kingship was not one which would enable him to force that nation to a concession it disliked: he laughed at the Dutch deputies when they spoke to him about it. It had already been seen that a remission of harbour-dues, which he had granted to certain Dutch ships, had been worthless; for the harbour-officials had declared that the King had no right to make any such arrangement. The dubious position of his throne, in the midst of great party struggles, imposed on him the duty of avoiding whatever might possibly strengthen the already existing, and indeed the almost natural, suspicion in English breasts that he was too partial to his countrymen. And so he was obliged, as King of England, to agree to the stipulation that the command of the combined fleet, which was to be in the proportion of fifty English to thirty Dutch ships, should always be given to an English admiral. Most reluctantly did the Dutch deputies, one of whom was the burgomaster Witsen, agree to the condition that neither power should make peace or truce with France without the consent of the other. They thought that William wished to secure their co-operation so long as Louis XIV supported his rival, King James, and that this would destroy all their independence. Through Witsen's letters runs an unexpected strain of bitterness against the new King. He signed the alliance, as he tells us himself, with a trembling hand: he regarded it as ruinous. He said he cursed the hour in which he set foot in England, and yet more that hour in which the proposed undertaking against James was first mentioned to him: had he known nothing of it, he had felt more at peace<sup>1</sup>.

Is it not as if these men had a presentiment of what was

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<sup>1</sup> There are three extracts from Witsen's original papers; one in Wagenaar; a second, connected with it, but with some special points of its own, in Grovestins; and a third, the one used in the text, in Scheltema. The original documents, as written by Witsen, deserved to have been given in full.

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coming? While the Republic of the Netherlands carried out the greatest political act that it had ever undertaken, by taking decisive part in the English Revolution, she also founded a new state of things, by which her free and independent action was to be limited for ever. For so it was. Pitiless are the great powers which fight for possession of the world! Had the Dutch not stood out as enemies to Louis and James, they must have fallen under the sway of the monarchical and Catholic principle. In helping to evoke and develop fully the Parliamentary power of England, they forced themselves to bow before the general preponderance in the world which fell to the lot of that power. William's strength came from this—that he made himself, as it were, a personal exponent of the necessity of things. He was ever resisted in the United Netherlands: especially in Amsterdam men felt most acutely their growing dependence upon him; but it was impossible for them to shake themselves clear of him without disowning the political principles they had professed, and ever must profess.

Still even there he found, first in Gaspar Fagel, and after Fagel's death in Antony Heinsius, a fellow-worker of the highest capacity, fully and completely attached to him.

And how remarkable were the dealings of the great men of this age with one another!

Accustomed to negotiation at home and abroad, and up to this time by no means always an adherent to the Statholder, Heinsius was elected Grand Pensionary of Holland: he accepted office provisionally. The new-made King, with whom in this capacity he corresponded, especially as to the agreement with the Emperor then under discussion, called on him to accept the office definitely, and promised him, from his side, all possible support. Heinsius still hesitated. Thereon the King assured him that no man was so fitted for the post; that he was bound in conscience to accept it; that no one, be he a ruler, or only a private person, might decline to do such service as he could render to the state; and least of all under such circumstances as the present<sup>1</sup>. Then, for the first

<sup>1</sup> 'Ende mien ick, dat een goed regent, jae selfs een particuliere ingeseten sigh niet magh ontrekken den dienst te doen, die in syn maght is, an den staet.'



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time, Heinsius determined to accept the office; the King assured him of his gratitude, and that he would take every opportunity of showing it.

Hence sprang one of the most remarkable series of letters that has ever seen the light, between the Prince and the statesman, who, though not strictly his minister, still held in fact an analogous position. How was the King, in the press of the weighty and entangled affairs of his island kingdom, to get a clear understanding of continental relations and their perpetual changes? Here Heinsius came to his help. At the Hague were gathered together all intelligence, proposals, answers, of the continental courts; these Heinsius announced, week by week, to the King, who replied in his own decided way: the Pensionary is circumstantial, detailed, diffuse; the King brief and solid. Between the two there exists an agreement in general views, as well as in individual convictions, which in each case leads to a conclusion, wherein each supplies the deficiencies of the other. As a rule, William concurred in the views set forth by Heinsius; from time to time he even asked him his opinion. Not unfrequently, however, the King took the initiative in both reflections and decisions.

Through the harmonious co-operation of these two able men, the alliance was agreed to and achieved. Northern affairs, from the very outset, had more part in this than might have been expected.

It would have been easy enough to draw Denmark into the alliance. In the spring of 1689, the Danish envoy, Lente, had declared in Holland that his King, Christian V, was ready to make an indissoluble alliance with Holland and England; if only good conditions were granted him, he would put on a war footing 20,000 men and forty ships of war—a force surely not to be despised. At this time the compact between the King of Denmark and France had all but expired. If, instead of renewing it, Christian V were on the contrary to throw his weight into the opposite scale, his justification for that course would lie in this, that William's enterprise having been successful, and a close alliance having thence arisen between the two sea-powers, France could now no longer

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defend him against them. And again, had he broken with Sweden, as at one time seemed likely, over the Holstein-Gottorp question, the sea-powers would have come to the help of Sweden: Heinsius had definitely said so to the envoy<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, the majority of the German princes went with Sweden and Holstein. But it was impossible for William and Heinsius to close with the Danish offer, however desirable in itself the additional strength thence arising might be. To do so would be to alienate Sweden, and probably to throw her into the arms of France; and this, considering the extent and position of the Swedish possessions in Germany, must have drawn after it most ruinous consequences. The endeavours of William and Heinsius were directed far more towards bringing about some agreement on the points at issue, and this to the advantage of the Duke of Holstein-Gottorp. Heinsius told the ambassadors plainly that since their King had made up his mind to act as judge and executive in his own cause, and as he had used violence, there remained no way of stopping the outbreak of war, except that of the restitution of the confiscated possessions, and a new recognition of the Duke's sovereignty. After some resistance, Denmark bowed to what was inevitable. The sea-powers and the German princes acted together in the treaty of Altona, which had been drafted by Paul Fuchs, a Brandenburg statesman, and approved by William, before it was laid before the court of Copenhagen. A personal relationship of William helped much to carry it through. He agreed to pay Prince George of Denmark, husband of his sister-in-law, the Princess Anne, the money due to him as his Danish apanage. Now Christian had granted the Prince some Gottorp dominions as his apanage; but as these must now be given back, the course of the peace-making was naturally greatly smoothed by having the payment of these apanages secured elsewhere. King William found the stipulation rather burdensome, and resisted at first; but the pacification of the North was so all-important in the present crisis of affairs, that

<sup>1</sup> They must 'reflexie nemen up den Koning van Sweden, als synde onse geallieerte.'