



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE DE WITTS AND THE WAR WITH ENGLAND

[1648-1672 A.D.]

THE completion of the Peace of Münster opens a new scene in the history of the republic. Its political system experienced considerable changes. Its ancient enemies became its most ardent friends, and its old allies loosened the bonds of long continued amity. The other states of Europe, displeased at its imperious conduct or jealous of its success, began to wish its humiliation; but it was little thought that the consummation was to be effected at the hands of England. While Holland prepared to profit by the peace so brilliantly gained, England, torn by civil war, was hurried on in crime and misery to the final act which has left an indelible stain on her annals. Cromwell and the parliament had completely subjugated the kingdom. The unfortunate king, delivered up by the Scotch, was condemned to an ignominious death.

The United Provinces had preserved a strict neutrality while the contest was undecided. The prince of Orange warmly strove to obtain a declaration in favour of his father-in-law Charles I. The prince of Wales and the duke of York, his sons, who had taken refuge at the Hague, earnestly joined in the entreaty; but all that could be obtained from the states-general was their consent to an embassy. Pauw and Joachimi, the one sixty-four years of age, the other eighty-eight, the most able men of the republic, undertook the task of mediation. They were scarcely listened to by the parliament, and the bloody sacrifice took place.

The details of this event and its immediate consequences belong to English history; and we must hurry over the brief, turbid, and inglorious stadholderate of William II, to arrive at the more interesting contest between the republic and the rival commonwealth.

[1648-1650 A.D.]

## THE AMBITIONS OF WILLIAM II

William II was now in his twenty-fourth year. He had early evinced that heroic disposition which was common to his race. He panted for military glory. All his pleasures were those usual to ardent and high-spirited men, although his delicate constitution seemed to forbid the indulgence of hunting, tennis, and the other violent exercises in which he delighted. He was highly accomplished; spoke five different languages with elegance and fluency; and had made considerable progress in mathematics and other abstract sciences. His ambition knew no bounds. Had he reigned over a monarchy as absolute king, he would most probably have gone down to posterity a conqueror and a hero. But, unfitted to direct a republic as its first citizen, he has left but the name of a rash and unconstitutional magistrate. From the moment of his accession to power he was made sensible of the jealousy and suspicion with which his office and his character were observed by the provincial states of Holland.

The province of Holland, arrogating to itself the greatest share in the reforms of the army, and the financial arrangements called for by the transition from war to peace, was soon in fierce opposition to the states-general, which supported the prince in his early views. Cornelis Bikker, one of the burgomasters of Amsterdam, was the leading person in the states of Holland; and a circumstance soon occurred which put him and the stadholder in collision, and quickly decided the great question at issue.

The admiral Cornelis de Witt arrived from Brazil<sup>1</sup> with the remains of his fleet, and without the consent of the council of regency established there by the states-general. He was arrested in 1650 by order of the prince of Orange, in his capacity of high admiral. The admiralty of Amsterdam was at the same time ordered by the states-general to imprison six of the captains of this fleet. The states of Holland maintained that this was a violation of their provincial rights, and an illegal assumption of power on the part of the states-general; and the magistrates of Amsterdam forced the prison doors and set the captains at liberty.

William, backed by the authority of the states-general, now put himself at the head of a deputation from that body, and made a rapid tour of visitation to the different chief towns of the republic, to sound the depths of public opinion on the matters in dispute. The deputation met with varied success; but the result proved to the irritated prince that no measures of compromise were to be expected, and that force alone was to arbitrate the question. The army was to a man devoted to him. The states-general gave him their entire and somewhat servile support. He therefore on his own authority arrested the six deputies of Holland, in the same way that his uncle Maurice had seized on Barneveld, Grotius, and the others; and they were immediately conveyed to the castle of Louvestein.

In adopting this bold and unauthorised measure, he decided on an imme-

[<sup>1</sup> In 1645 the West India Company had begun rapidly to lose the conquests they had been acquiring in South America during the last fifteen years. The company had, in the last year, recalled Count Maurice of Nassau, in order to spare the expenses attendant on a governor of his rank and dignity, and the same ill-judged parsimony which thus left the colony destitute of any chief of ordinary military skill had kept the establishment of troops in a condition wholly inefficient for its protection. Immediately on the departure of Maurice, the Portuguese broke out into open revolt, captured several forts, amongst which were Surinam and St. Vincent, and had it not been for a timely succour sent by the Company in the next year, the Dutch must have been forced to abandon all their possessions in South America. Cornelis de Witt was a captain in the service of the company.]

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diate attempt to gain possession of the city of Amsterdam, the central point of opposition to his violent designs. William Frederick count of Nassau, stadholder of Friesland, at the head of a numerous detachment of troops, marched secretly and by night to surprise the town; but the darkness and a violent thunder storm having caused the greater number to lose their way, the count found himself at dawn at the city gates with a very insufficient force; and had the farther mortification to see the walls well manned, the cannon pointed, the drawbridges raised, and everything in a state of defence. The courier from Hamburg, who had passed through the scattered bands of soldiers during the night, had given the alarm. The first notion was, that a roving band of Swedish or Lorraine troops, attracted by the opulence of Amsterdam, had resolved on an attempt to seize and pillage it. The magistrates could scarcely credit the evidence of day, which showed them the count of Nassau and his force on their hostile mission. A short conference with the deputies from the citizens convinced him that a speedy retreat was the only measure of safety for himself and his force, as the sluices of the dykes were in part opened, and a threat of submerging the intended assailants only required a moment more to be enforced.

Nothing could exceed the disappointment and irritation of the prince of Orange consequent on this transaction. He at first threatened, then negotiated, and finally patched up the matter in a manner the least mortifying to his wounded pride. Bikker nobly offered himself for a peace-offering, and voluntarily resigned his employments in the city he had saved; and De Witt and his officers were released. William was in some measure consoled for his disgrace by the condolence of the army, the thanks of the province of Zealand, and a new treaty with France, strengthened by promises of future support from Cardinal Mazarin; but, before he could profit by these encouraging symptoms, domestic and foreign, a premature death cut short all his projects of ambition. Over-violent exercises in a shooting party in Gelderland brought on a fever, which soon terminated in an attack of small-pox. On the first appearance of his illness he was removed to the Hague; and he died there on the 6th of November, 1650, aged twenty-four years and six months.

The death of this prince left the state without a stadholder, and the army without a chief. The whole of Europe shared more or less in the joy or the regret it caused. The republican party, both in Holland and in England, rejoiced in a circumstance which threw back the sovereign power into the hands of the nation; the partisans of the house of Orange deeply lamented the event. But the birth of a son, of which the widowed princess of Orange was delivered within a week of her husband's death, revived the hopes of those who mourned his loss, and offered her the only consolation which could assuage her grief.

This child was, however, the innocent cause of a breach between his mother and grandmother, the dowager princess, who had never been cordially attached to each other. Each claimed the guardianship of the young prince; and the dispute was at length decided by the states, who adjudged the important office to the elector of Brandenburg and the two princesses jointly. The states of Holland soon exercised their influence on the other

[<sup>1</sup> On the meeting of the deputies from the provinces, or, as it was termed, the Great Assembly, the proceedings were opened January 18th, 1651, by the pensionary of Holland, Jacob Catz, who, in a long oration, recommended to the assembly the consideration of the maintenance of the Union, as framed in 1579; of religion, as established by the decrees of the synod of Dort (Dordrecht); and of the militia, in conformity with the resolutions passed at the time of the peace. The Union, notwithstanding the complaints lately made of the violation of it by the states of Holland, was adjudged to exist in its integrity and pristine vigour.]

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provinces. Many of the prerogatives of the stadholder were now assumed by the people; and, with the exception of Zealand, which made an ineffectual attempt to name the infant prince to the dignity of his ancestors under the title of William III, a perfect unanimity seemed to have reconciled all opposing interests. The various towns secured the privileges of appointing their own magistrates, and the direction of the army and navy devolved to the states-general.<sup>b</sup>

## FOREIGN RELATIONS

At the termination of the negotiations at Münster, the United Provinces found themselves on a footing of cordial amity with scarcely any nation of Europe, except Spain, their ancient enemy, and Denmark, whom they had forced to conclude a disadvantageous treaty with Sweden a few years before. Sweden, closely allied with France, shared in some degree the resentment of that nation against the states-general, on account of their separate treaty with Spain; and was further alienated by the support they had given to the claims of the elector of Brandenburg to the restoration of Pomerania.

The truce with Portugal, so hastily concluded in 1641, had never since been observed, either in the East or West Indies; and the revolt of Pernambuco was strongly suspected to have been fomented, if not occasioned, by the secret machinations of that court. Hostilities continued in Brazil, until terminated in the manner we shall hereafter have occasion to notice.

## LOSSES OF THE WAR WITH ENGLAND

The feeling with which the intelligence of the execution of Charles I was received by all ranks of men in the United Provinces was one of unmingled detestation. The states-general and states of Holland immediately waited upon the prince of Wales, attired in deep mourning, to condole with him for his loss; they saluted him with the title of majesty as king of Scotland; but Holland and Zealand, whom the interests of their commerce obliged to keep some appearance of terms with the new republic, obtained that the title of king of Great Britain should be omitted, and no mention made of congratulations upon his accession to the throne of his ancestors. But, however modified this proceeding, it failed not to give the deepest offence to the parliament, more particularly as not one of the great powers of Europe, with the exception of Christina, queen of Sweden, ventured to pay the fugitive monarch a similar compliment. The ministers of the churches at the Hague, also, a class of men hitherto the most unfriendly to the royalists of England, presented an address of condolence to Charles, in which they compared the execution of the deceased king to the martyrdom of St. Stephen. But for this they were sharply reprehended by the states of Holland, as assuming an interference in political affairs unbecoming their character and calling.

On the other hand, the ambassador of the parliament, Strickland, had been constantly refused a public audience by the states-general; and the melancholy fate of Isaac Dorislaus, who was now sent over to propose a league of amity between the two republics, afforded new matter of bitterness and hatred. This man, the son of a minister of Enkhuizen, had been made professor of history in the university of Cambridge; but afterwards espousing warmly the side of the parliament, was nominated one of the counsel for conducting the prosecution of the king.

These circumstances rendered him peculiarly obnoxious to the royalist party, of whom great numbers had taken refuge at the Hague, and he was



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accordingly marked out as the first victim upon whom vengeance was to be exercised. The evening after his arrival, as he was sitting with some other persons in the room of an inn at the Hague, four men entered in masks, leaving several others stationed outside to keep watch. They first mortally wounded a gentleman of Gelderland, whom they mistook for Dorislaus. The latter endeavoured to make use of the opportunity to escape; but, unable in his agitation to open the door, he was seized upon and murdered with several wounds. The assassins, who proved to be followers of the earl of Montrose, then dispersed unmolested; and were subsequently enabled, by the aid of their numerous friends, to quit the Hague in safety.

The court of Holland immediately took Strickland under their special protection, and offered a reward of 1,000 guilders for the discovery of the criminals; but the parliament of England persisted in believing, or affecting to believe, that they were allowed to escape by connivance; and made violent complaints of the outrage committed against them in the person of their ambassador, to Joachimi, resident of the states in London. Not long after, Strickland quitted the provinces without having succeeded in procuring an audience of the states-general; and Joachimi, to whom they refused to send letters of credence to the new government of England, was commanded to leave that country. Thus matters appeared ripe for an immediate rupture; the only friendly relations between the commonwealths being maintained by the states of Holland, who sent a commissioner to London with instructions to award to the republican government such style and title as might be found most pleasing, and to watch over the commercial interests of the province.

The death of William II had inspired the parliament with the hope that, through the influence of Holland with the other provinces which had now no counterpoise, they might be brought to consent to an alliance of close and exclusive amity with England. Oliver St. John and Walter Strickland were accordingly sent with this view as ambassadors to the Hague, where — so much were affairs changed — they immediately obtained a public audience of the great assembly which was then sitting, and commissioners were appointed to treat with them concerning the terms of the proposed alliance. Never, perhaps, were negotiations opened between two powers to both of whom the maintenance of peace with the other was an object of more vital importance.

A war with England was to the United Provinces ever an event to be deprecated and dreaded. It must necessarily be maritime; and, even if attended with the most signal success, as ruinous to themselves as to her. In debasing the power of England, they cast down the bulwark of their own religion and liberties against their natural enemies, the Catholic and absolute sovereigns of Europe; in destroying her commerce, they annihilated the most ready and advantageous market for their own wares; while the expense of protecting their vessels must in any case swallow up the profits of their merchants, and occasion a certain and immense decay of trade. In the event of adverse fortune, which, considering the relative strength of their antagonist, would appear almost inevitable, the very existence of the provinces was endangered.

Neither was it from motives of national interest alone that the Dutch might be supposed to view a war with England with the deepest aversion. They could not but reflect in how large a measure she had contributed to their own happiness and glory; that all their proudest recollections were associated with her; that nearly a century had now elapsed since the Dutch-

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man had appeared on the field of battle without the Englishman by his side, or a drop of his blood been shed but the bravest and noblest of England had been mingled with it; that the bones of their fathers had lain whitening together on the ramparts of Haarlem and on the strand of Nieuport. Long and intimate intercourse had, indeed, so mixed together the population of the two countries, that a war between them was scarcely less than fratricidal.

Neither was it less incumbent upon the present government of England to keep peace with the provinces, the only foreign power from whence any vigorous attempt

to restore the exiled royal family was to be apprehended. The nation, exhausted by the civil war she had now waged for so many years, filled with discontents, and weary of the extortions of the parliament, was ill-prepared to sustain the vast charges which a war with so powerful a maritime nation as the Dutch must necessarily bring in its train. In this state of affairs, and with no objects of dispute existing between the two nations but such as might have been readily arranged, it might be supposed that an alliance would prove a matter of speedy and easy accomplishment. Yet was this desirable object frustrated by unforeseen, and, as it would appear, wholly inadequate causes.

Among other visionary schemes in which the parliament of England indulged was that of forming a coalition between the two republics under one sovereign, and a council, sitting in England, wherein the states were to be represented by a certain number of members. To this end the negotiations of the ambassadors were to be directed; but fearful that if too abruptly broached, the proposal would be at once rejected by the states as absurd and infeasible, they were instructed to keep it carefully in the background, and to pave the way for its introduction by the offer of a close and intimate alliance between the two republics. But even this was proposed upon terms with which it was utterly impossible for the states to comply, had they been ever so well inclined. The parliament demanded that the states should expel



OFFICER OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, AFTER PAINTING BY TERBURG

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those who were declared rebels in England from the United Provinces, or any territory belonging to the prince or princess of Orange, and that they should not permit the prince or princess to aid or succour such rebels in any manner, on pain of forfeiture for life of the estates on which they had been harboured. As the English fugitives were protected and warmly favoured by the Orange party, any attempt to dislodge them from the boundaries of the provinces would be resisted by the whole power of that party. The states therefore, unanimously resolved that they would not interfere in any manner in the quarrel between the English parliament and Charles II of Scotland. The negotiations thus made no progress, and were soon terminated by the hasty recall of the ambassadors, in consequence of the treatment they had experienced at the Hague.

The Orange party in the United Provinces, strongly attached to the royal cause in England, were even desirous of involving their country in a war to accomplish the restoration of Charles II. The English ambassadors, immediately on their arrival at the Hague, were surrounded, and greeted with the cry of "regicides" and "executioners," by a rabble of the lowest class, to whom, it is said, a page of the princess royal had distributed money; and during the whole period of their stay, neither themselves nor any of their household could appear in the streets without being loaded with reproaches and contumely, and even incurring danger of personal violence from the populace, encouraged and assisted by the English royalists and the chiefs of the Orange party. Prince Edward, son of the titular Queen of Bohemia, who had taken a prominent share in these outrages, was summoned to appear before the court of Holland, and one of his servants was scourged and another banished. But all the efforts of the authorities to arrest the petulance of the mob proved futile; and a military guard was at length placed over the house where the ambassadors resided.

#### THE ACT OF NAVIGATION (1651)

The insults they had received sank deep into the minds of the ambassadors, more especially St. John. On his return to England, he delayed not to exhibit his feelings of vengeance by carrying through the parliament the celebrated Act of Navigation, the object of which was the ruin of the Dutch commerce. By this act it was decreed that no productions of Asia, Africa, or America should be brought to England, except in vessels belonging to that nation, and of which the greater portion of the crews were English; and that no productions of Europe were to be imported into England except in ships belonging to the country of which such productions were the growth or manufacture. As the United Provinces had little of their own produce to export, but maintained an immense carrying trade to England, as well from the other nations of Europe as the more distant quarters of the globe, the drift of this measure could scarcely be mistaken, even had it not been rendered evident by an article declaring that the prohibition did not extend to bullion or silk wares brought from Italy; while salted fish, whales, and whale oil, commodities of special traffic with the Dutch, were expressly forbidden to be exported or imported except in English bottoms. This step was followed by letters of reprisal issued to such persons as conceived themselves aggrieved by the inhabitants of the United Provinces; and by the equipment of two men-of-war, which inflicted immense injury on the Holland and Zealand merchant ships.

[1652 A.D.]

## FIRST NAVAL ENGAGEMENT (1652)

Regarding these proceedings as equivalent to a declaration of hostility, the states-general, while they dispatched an embassy to London to complain to the parliament on the subject, and to propose the renewal of a treaty, framed, as far as present circumstances permitted, upon the model of that of 1496, resolved on the immediate equipment of one hundred and fifty ships of war to protect their navigation and fishery. The command of the fleet was intrusted to Marten Harpertzoon Tromp, with instructions to cruise in the Channel, but to avoid as much as possible the coasts of England; the question of striking the flag to the vessels of that nation being left to his discretion.

Tromp, receiving intelligence that seven rich merchantmen from Turkey were closely pressed by some English privateers, sailed towards the coast of Dover, with forty-two vessels, where he encountered the English admiral, Blake, at the head of a squadron fifteen in number. He was preparing for lowering his sails to the English flag, when Blake fired two shots into his ship. A third, Tromp answered with a shot that went through the English admiral's flag. Blake instantly sent a broadside into the Dutch ship, which Tromp was not slow in returning. The English being reinforced with eight vessels from the Downs, both fleets then engaged in a fierce contest, which, after four hours' duration, was terminated by the approach of night, with the loss of two ships on the side of the Dutch.

Such is the account given by Tromp, in a letter to the states-general; but Blake asserted that Tromp, being warned by three shots to strike to the English flag, fired a broadside instead of obeying. Which of the two was to blame, is impossible to decide.

Immediately on information of this engagement, the states, desirous of proving that they were not wilfully the aggressors, commissioned Adrian Pauw, lately chosen pensionary of Holland on the resignation of Jacob Catz, to represent to the parliament that if Tromp had committed the first act of hostility, it was entirely in consequence of a misunderstanding, since no instructions of that nature had been given him; and to endeavour to terminate the affair by an amicable arrangement. To this the parliament showed itself by no means inclined; they demanded a reimbursement of their expenses, or satisfaction, as they termed it, and security for the preservation of peace in future, by which was meant an immediate compliance with their proposal of coalition between the two republics; conditions which were of course inadmissible for a moment. The states-general, therefore, ordered Tromp to engage with the English ships on every opportunity, and the war now commenced in good earnest.

## WAR OPENLY DECLARED

Blake having attacked the Dutch herring boats, destroyed several, and scattered the remainder, Tromp directed his course in search of the English fleet; but, being overtaken by a violent storm, he was forced to seek refuge, with his ships much disabled, in the ports of Holland. This misfortune, though wholly beyond his control, brought Tromp into temporary disfavour with the common people; and many members of the government suspecting that, to serve the purposes of the house of Orange, of which he was a zealous partisan, he had wilfully given rise to the dispute concerning the flag, in order to involve

his country in a war, he was superseded by Michel de Ruyter. The new admiral, at the head of thirty light vessels and eight fire-ships, fell in with Sir George Ayscue, near Plymouth. After a sharp and well-fought engagement, Ayscue was forced to retire into the harbour, whither the Dutch ships were prevented by a contrary wind from following him. De Ruyter having soon after joined another squadron, under the vice-admiral, Cornelis de Witt, they were attacked while cruising on the Flemish coast by Blake and Ayscue. In this encounter, twenty of the Dutch ships kept out of gunshot; and De Ruyter, finding himself considerably weaker than his opponent, retired to the haven of Gorée.

The unrivalled skill and experience of Tromp, in maritime affairs, prompted the states once more to reinstate him in his post as head of the fleet, De Ruyter taking the command of a squadron under him. The coasts of Dover and Folkestone were the next scene of combat, when two English ships were captured; Blake, being himself wounded, and many of his ships disabled, was obliged to retire to the Thames, leaving the sea clear for the passage of a large number of merchant ships into the ports of the United Provinces.

Both the belligerents took advantage of the cessation of hostilities during the winter months to improve the condition of their naval armaments. The states proposed to add another hundred and fifty vessels to the fleet of that number they already possessed; but the public finances not admitting of so heavy an expense, they were obliged to content themselves with repairing and refitting the old ones. Seventy only remained under the immediate command of Tromp, the rest being employed in various quarters as convoys. With these he received orders to blockade the Thames; but while previously escorting two hundred merchant ships on their return home, he was intercepted by Blake off Portland Point, Feb. 28, 1653. The two fleets were equal in number, but vastly disproportioned in strength, from the inferior size and equipment of the Dutch vessels, of which a great number were merely armed merchant ships, hired by the states in the beginning of the war.

Blake commenced the attack by a distant fire into the ship of the Dutch admiral, which Tromp left unanswered till he had come within musket-shot of the enemy, when he gave him a broadside, and rapidly veering round sent in another from the opposite side of his vessel. The lightness of his ship enabling him to sail round his antagonist, he discharged a third fire into her opposite side, which was followed by a loud cry, as though several in the English ship were wounded. Blake, then retreating, kept up only a skirmishing fight. De Ruyter at first engaged with the *Prosperity*, of fifty-four guns, his own vessel being no more than twenty-eight. Suffering considerably from the enemy's cannon, he ran close up for the purpose of boarding, and on the second assault captured the English vessel. But, being afterwards surrounded by twenty others, he was obliged to abandon it; and with difficulty extricated himself from his perilous situation by the aid of the vice-admiral, Evertsen. He afterwards, with two of his captains, engaged seven large vessels of the English. Many others performed prodigies of valour; but, as evening approached, Tromp desisted about six-and-twenty of his ships taking advantage of the wind to escape.

Darkness at length separated the combatants. Two vessels were sunk on the side of the English, and as many on that of the Dutch; one of the latter was captured and burned, another blew up, and that of De Ruyter was greatly damaged. During the night the Dutch retired towards the Isle of Wight, whither they were pursued by the English, who renewed the attack the next morning. The latter now fired, chiefly from a distance, at the masts and



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rigging of their opponents, with the view, after having disabled the vessels of war, to take possession of the merchantmen, which Tromp was endeavouring to protect by ranging the fleet in a semicircle around them. The contest was again prolonged, with unflinching courage on both sides, until evening, when the fleets separated without any decisive advantage; but the Dutch had expended nearly all their ammunition, and De Ruyter's ship was so disabled that she was obliged to be taken in tow. Nevertheless, Tromp commanded his captains to show a good face to the enemy, and prepared to renew the engagement, which commenced at ten in the forenoon of the following day. At the first attack Tromp approached close to the ship of the vice-admiral, which he cannonaded so briskly as to force him to retire. De Ruyter, though still in tow, was found in the midst of the enemy until his ship was so damaged as to become utterly helpless. But again a portion of the Dutch captains failed in their duty by retreating from the fight; some did so in consequence of having no more ammunition, others had no excuse but their cowardice.

Mere exhaustion at length compelled both parties to a cessation of hostilities; yet, after sunset, Blake made as if he was about to renew the attack. Tromp took in his sails to await his approach, when the English admiral, changing his purpose, sailed towards the shores of England, and the Dutch continued their course homewards without pursuit. The Dutch had nine vessels missing, the English only five or six; but the loss in killed among the latter far surpassed that of their antagonists, amounting to two thousand, while no more than six hundred perished on the side of the Dutch. The former claimed the victory; but



MARTIN HARPERTSOON TROMP (1597-1653)

the latter reckoned it as an advantage, more than equivalent to a triumph, that they had been able to preserve all their merchant vessels — except twenty-four, which fell into the hands of the enemy. The states-general testified the highest satisfaction at the conduct of Tromp and De Ruyter, and the other commanders who had offered such determined resistance to a fleet so vastly more powerful than their own.<sup>1</sup>

About the same time the Dutch commander, Jan van Galen, obtained a signal victory over some English vessels under Appleton, near the port of Leghorn. The English had three ships captured, and as many destroyed; but their loss was counterbalanced on the side of their enemies by the death of Van Galen.

After the event of the last battle the states were active in repairing their fleet and putting it in a condition again to take the sea. The command was given to Tromp, which he accepted, but with extreme reluctance.

The English fleet, now commanded by George Monk (the restorer of

[<sup>1</sup> After the victory Tromp is said to have placed a broom at his masthead to intimate that he would sweep the channel free of English ships. Although this incident has been pronounced mythical by some recent historians, it is accepted by such authorities as Green, Bright, Gardiner, etc.]

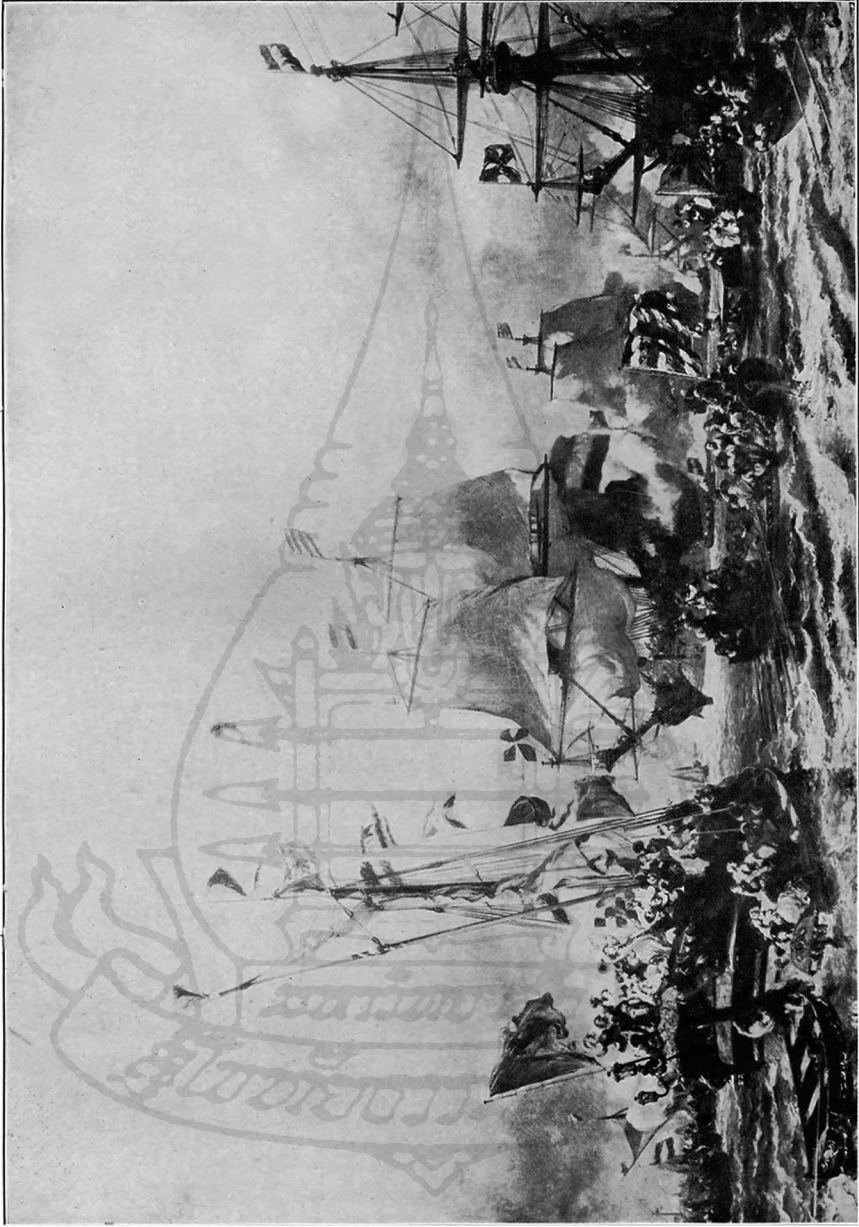
royalty to his country) and Richard Deane, consisted of ninety-five sail. In cruising about the shores of Zealand and Flanders, they at length fell in with the Dutch vessels under Tromp, at the harbour of Newport. The latter were ninety-eight in number, with six fire ships, but incomparably inferior in size to the enemy. In spite of this overwhelming disadvantage the contest was terrific; and, though several ships were disabled on both sides, and the admiral, Deane, was slain, it continued until nine at night, and was renewed the next day before Dunkirk. The English had now the advantage of the wind, and the Dutch were thus precluded from adopting the only mode of attack, that of closing and boarding, which could place them on anything like an equal footing with their antagonists. Some disorder also occurred in the Dutch fleet, by the ships running foul of each other, and seven fell into the enemy's hands. At the close of the day, Tromp found so great a number of his ships damaged, and all so deficient in ammunition, that he was forced to retire behind the sandbank of the Wielingen, on the coast of Zealand.

This, the first decided defeat which the Dutch navy had sustained, called forth grievous complaints from Tromp and the principal commanders to the states-general. They urged that it would be impossible for them to carry on the war without a powerful reinforcement of good and well equipped vessels; since there were in the English fleet more than fifty, of which the smallest was larger than the Dutch admiral, and thirty of their own were totally unfit for battle. The vice-admiral De Witt, in his address to the states, bluntly exclaimed: "I am here before my masters: but why dissemble? The English are in fact our masters, and we are debarred from the navigation of the seas till we have better ships"; and De Ruyter declared that he would go to sea no more unless some remedy were provided for the present state of things. Though time did not admit of the completion of new vessels, the states, convinced of the justice of the remonstrances made by their officers, laboured so earnestly to satisfy them, that within six weeks Tromp was despatched, with nearly ninety sail.<sup>c</sup>

#### DEATH OF TROMP (1653)

The English had crossed to Texel with a large fleet, and it was difficult for the two Dutch squadrons to meet. Tromp set sail the 6th of August with ninety vessels intending to attack the English fleet, cross it, and join De Witt, return with him to the enemy, and force them to quit the coast of Holland. On the morning of the 8th he discovered the English; and withdrew in order to draw the English after him and away from Texel, where De Witt would be able to join him. Several of De Witt's vessels with less sail than his own were engaged by the English; Tromp went to their assistance, and the combat commenced at four in the evening. The fight continued until an hour after sunset without any advantage being gained by the English, although their fleet far out-numbered the Dutch, there being about 125 sail. Tromp's venture succeeded and De Witt escaped from Texel during the fight, joining him the next day, so increasing his fleet by twenty-seven sail. Tromp, now reinforced, advanced on the English.

The 10th of August at seven in the morning the opposing fleets met and the combat commenced. Tromp commanded the right wing, De Ruyter the left, Vice-Admiral Evertsen the centre, and De Witt the rear. The Dutch passed at first across the enemy. Tromp was already in the middle of the English fleet; wishing to give an order to the gunners he started to leave the deck, but was struck in the breast with a musket-ball. Crying out: "it is over with me; but for you, take courage," he expired. The captain



**THE EMBARKATION OF RUYTER AND WILLIAM DE WITT**

(From the painting by Eugène Isabey in the Luxembourg)

[1653 A.D.]

of the vessel signaled the other captains to come and hold council. They were overcome with grief on seeing their commander stretched on the deck. It is said that De Ruyter, pausing to contemplate his body, said: "Ah! would that God had taken me in his place; he was more useful to the country than I."

Orders were immediately given to leave the admiral's pennant on his vessel in order that the enemy and the rest of the Dutch fleet might be kept in ignorance of the misfortune. Vice-admiral Evertsen took command and the men returned to their posts. The desire to avenge the death of their general incited the Dutch to prodigies of valour. De Ruyter, who commanded the *Ajneau*, threw himself into the most perilous places, and by the terrific fire which he kept up forced his way: this course, however, brought upon him all the enemy's attacks; and, losing the greater part of his men and failing of ammunition, he was forced to go toward the Maas. At four o'clock the two fleets were so weary and in such bad condition that they separated.<sup>9</sup>

Each side claimed the honour of a victory; both shared the disasters of a defeat. The English lost eight vessels and eleven hundred men in killed and wounded; the Dutch nine or ten vessels, about an equal number of slain, with seven hundred prisoners. Neither fleet kept the sea — the Dutch retiring into the Texel, and the English towards the Thames. The former considered it as a decisive advantage to have freed their coasts from the presence of the enemy's ships, but this was more than counterbalanced by the inestimable loss they sustained in the death of their commander Tromp. The states evinced their gratitude to his memory by the care they took of his widow and posterity, and the erection of a magnificent monument to him in the church at Delft.

Determined to show that they had regained possession of the sea, the states despatched the fleet under De Witt to convoy the merchant vessels from the north, which arrived, to the number of four hundred, safely in port. No further engagement occurred during this season.

Both the belligerents had now become heartily weary of a war engaged in for no valid reason, between parties who had no cause of quarrel except such as their mutual pride and obstinacy afforded. Among the Dutch the causes of anxiety for the termination of hostilities were increased in tenfold proportion. The whole of the eighty years' maritime war with Spain had neither exhausted their treasury nor inflicted so much injury on their commerce as the events of the last two years. The province of Holland alone paid from six to seven millions annually as interest for her debt, and while the taxes began to press severely on all ranks of the people, their usual sources of gain were nearly closed: the Greenland fishery was stopped; the herring fishery, the "gold mine of Holland," unsafe, and almost worthless, the English having captured an immense number of the boats; and the decay of trade was so great that in Amsterdam alone three thousand houses were lying vacant.

To these causes were added others peculiar to the province of Holland. The states of this province, whom the proceedings of the late stadholder had rendered strongly averse to the Orange family, had applied all their efforts to prevent the young prince William from being appointed to that office, and that of captain and admiral-general. These had hitherto been successful; but the increased influence which his party gained by the continuance of the war might soon enable them to carry that measure in spite of all opposition. The name of the prince of Orange had heretofore been used in raising recruits

for the army and navy; and the people readily flew to the conclusion that the unwonted disasters of the late maritime encounters were to be attributed to the want of the customary head of affairs. The states of Zealand had already found themselves obliged, in compliance with the clamours of the populace, to propose a resolution that the young prince should be invested with the offices enjoyed by his father, and Count William of Nassau appointed his lieutenant; and it might be feared that the discontents arising from the present state of things would incline Gelderland, Utrecht, and Overysseel, and even some towns of Holland itself, to the same measure for which Friesland and Groningen were strenuous advocates.

#### JAN DE WITT

At the head of the party favourable to peace, and opposed to the prince of Orange, or the "Louvestein faction," as it was termed, was Jan De Witt, chosen in the early part of this year pensionary of Holland, on the death of Adrian Pauw. He was the son of Jacob De Witt, pensionary of Dordrecht, one of the six deputies who had been thrown into prison by the late stadholder; an injury which had implanted in the mind of the young man feelings of resentment deep, bitter, and implacable.<sup>1</sup> De Witt obtained the usual act of indemnity, whereby reparation was promised him for all the injuries he might sustain in the execution of his office, and that he should be bound to give an account of his actions to none but the states of Holland. He was at this time not quite eight and twenty; yet had merited and obtained so high an esteem for his talents and prudence, that he was often called the Wisdom of Holland. The enmity existing between him and the family of Orange rendered him, however, always unpopular with the multitude.

The states of Holland, informed by a spy whom they kept in England of the favourable dispositions of that government, had, in the early part of the year, secretly dispatched a letter expressive of their desire that the parliament would unite with them in terminating a war ruinous to both nations and to the Reformed religion which they mutually professed. The parliament returned an answer both to the states of Holland and the states-general, signifying their willingness to put an end to the present state of affairs. But notwithstanding that secrecy was in the highest degree requisite, at the beginning at least of the negotiations, they caused the letter of the states of Holland to be printed and published, with the title of *The Humble Petition of the States of Holland to the Parliament of England for Peace*.

This display of insolence had well-nigh frustrated all attempts at accommodation. The states-general testified extreme chagrin at the opening of a separate negotiation on the part of Holland; Groningen and Gelderland strongly urged that it should be pursued no further; and, together with Zealand, proposed to take advantage of the opportunity to enter into a strict alliance with France against England. At the persuasion of the states of Holland, however, the states-general ultimately consented to send ambassadors to London; the lords Beverning and Nieuport from Holland, Van de Perre from Zealand, and Peter Jongestal from Friesland; the two former adherents of the Louvestein party, the latter partisans of the house of Orange.<sup>c</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These sentiments were sedulously inculcated and nourished by his father, who, on morning salutation to him is said to have often been "Remember the prison of Louvestein."



[1654-1658 A.D.]

## PEACE WITH ENGLAND (1654)

The want of peace was felt throughout the whole country. Cromwell was not averse to grant it; but he insisted on conditions every way disadvantageous and humiliating. He had revived his chimerical scheme of a total conjunction of government, privileges, and interests between the two republics. This was firmly rejected by Jan De Witt and by the states under his influence. But the Dutch consented to a defensive league; to punish the survivors of those concerned in the massacre of Amboyna; to pay £9,000 of indemnity for vessels seized in the Sound, £5,000 for the affair of Amboyna, and £85,000 to the English East India Company; to cede to them the island of Polerone in the East; to yield the honour of the national flag to the English; and, finally, that neither the young prince of Orange nor any of his family should ever be invested with the dignity of stadholder. These two latter conditions were certainly degrading to Holland; and the conditions of the treaty proved that an absurd point of honour was the only real cause for the short but bloody and ruinous war which plunged the provinces into overwhelming difficulties.

## WAR WITH SWEDEN

The supporters of the house of Orange, and every impartial friend of the national honour, were indignant at the Act of Exclusion. Murmurs and revolts broke out in several towns; and all was once more tumult, agitation, and doubt. No event of considerable importance marks particularly this epoch of domestic trouble. A new war was at last pronounced inevitable, and was the means of appeasing the distractions of the people, and reconciling by degrees contending parties. Denmark, the ancient ally of the republic, was threatened with destruction by Charles Gustavus, king of Sweden, who held Copenhagen in blockade. The interests of Holland were in imminent peril should the Swedes gain the passage of the Sound. This double motive influenced De Witt; and he persuaded the states-general to send Admiral Opdam with a considerable fleet to the Baltic (1658). This intrepid successor of the immortal Tromp soon came to blows with a rival worthy to meet him. Wrangel the Swedish admiral, with a superior force, defended the passage of the Sound; and the two castles of Cronenberg and Elsenberg supported his fleet with their tremendous fire. But Opdam resolutely advanced: though suffering extreme anguish from an attack of gout, he had himself carried on deck, where he gave his orders with the most admirable coolness and precision, in the midst of danger and carnage. The rival monarchs witnessed the battle; the king of Sweden from the castle of Cronenberg, and the king of Denmark from the summit of the highest tower in his besieged capital. A brilliant victory crowned the efforts of the Dutch admiral, dearly bought by the death of his second in command the brave Cornelis De Witt, and Peter Florizon another admiral of note. Relief was poured into Copenhagen. Opdam was replaced in the command, too arduous for his infirm-

[<sup>1</sup> The absorbing events of the English war, and the previous commotions in the provinces, had prevented the states from affording to the West India Company that aid of which they had long stood in the most pressing need. After the revolt of the Portuguese, in 1645, it had so rapidly lost its possessions in Brazil, that at the time of the peace of Münster they were reduced to three forts. In 1654, the fort of the Recif was taken, that of Rio Grande burned, and, by the surrender of the third to the Portuguese, they became sole and undisputed masters of Brazil.]

[1659-1665 A.D.]

ities, by the still celebrated De Ruyter, who was greatly distinguished by his valour in several successive affairs: and after some months more of useless obstinacy, the king of Sweden, seeing his army perish in the island of Funen, by a combined attack of those of Holland and Denmark, consented to a peace highly favourable to the latter power.

These transactions placed the United Provinces on a still higher pinnacle of glory than they had ever reached. Intestine disputes were suddenly calmed. The Algerines and other pirates were swept from the seas by a succession of small but vigorous expeditions. The mediation of the states re-established peace in several of the petty states of Germany. England and France were both held in check, if not preserved in friendship, by the dread of their recovered power. Trade and finance were reorganised. Everything seemed to promise a long-continued peace and growing greatness, much of which was owing to the talents and persevering energy of De Witt; and, to complete the good work of European tranquillity, the French and Spanish monarchs concluded in 1659 the treaty known by the name of the Peace of the Pyrenees.

Cromwell had now closed his career, and Charles II was restored to the throne from which he had so long been excluded. The complimentary entertainments rendered to the restored king in Holland were on the proudest scale of expense. He left the country which had given him refuge in misfortune, and done him honour in his prosperity, with profuse expressions of regard and gratitude. Scarcely was he established in his recovered kingdom, when a still greater testimony of deference to his wishes was paid, by the states-general formally annulling the Act of Exclusion against the house of Orange. A variety of motives, however, acting on the easy and plastic mind of the monarch, soon effaced whatever of gratitude he had at first conceived. He readily entered into the views of the English nation, which was irritated by the great commercial superiority of Holland, and a jealousy excited by its close connection with France at this period.

#### ENGLAND DECLARES WAR

It was not till the 22nd of February, 1665, that war was formally declared against the Dutch; but many previous acts of hostility had taken place in expeditions against their settlements on the coast of Africa and in America, which were retaliated by De Ruyter with vigour and success in 1664. The Dutch used every possible means of avoiding the last extremities. De Witt employed all the powers of his great capacity to avert the evil of war; but nothing could finally prevent it<sup>1</sup> and the sea was once more to witness the conflict between those who claimed its sovereignty.

A great battle was fought on the 31st of June. The duke of York, afterwards James II, commanded the British fleet, and had under him the earl of Sandwich and Prince Rupert. The Dutch were led on by Opdam; and the victory was decided in favour of the English by the accidental blowing up of that admiral's ship, with himself and his whole crew. The loss of the Dutch was altogether nineteen ships. De Witt, the pensionary, then took in person the command of the fleet, which was soon equipped; and he gave a high proof of the adaptation of genius to a pursuit previously unknown, by the rapid knowledge and the practical improvements he introduced into some of the most intricate branches of naval tactics.

[<sup>1</sup> Without declaration of war the English seized 130 Dutch merchantmen in their ports. The formal declaration did not follow for some months, March 4, 1665.]

[1665-1666 A. D.]

Immense efforts were now made by England, but with a very questionable policy, to induce Louis XIV to join in the war. Charles offered to allow of his acquiring the whole of the Spanish Netherlands, provided he would leave him without interruption to destroy the Dutch navy (and, consequently, their commerce), in the by no means certain expectation that its advantages would all fall to the share of England. But the king of France resolved to support the republic. The king of Denmark, too, formed an alliance with them, after a series of the most strange tergiversations. Spain, reduced to feebleness, and menaced with invasion by France, showed no alacrity to meet with Charles' overtures for an offensive treaty. Galen, bishop of Münster, a restless prelate, was the only ally he could acquire. This bishop, at the head of a tumultuous force of twenty thousand men, penetrated into Friesland; but six thousand French were despatched by Louis to the assistance of the republic, and this important invasion was easily repelled.

The republic, encouraged by all these favourable circumstances, resolved to put forward its utmost energies. Internal discords were once more appeased; the harbours were crowded with merchant ships; the young prince of Orange had put himself under the tuition of the states of Holland and of De Witt, who faithfully executed his trust; and De



A SHIP OF DE RUYTER'S DAY

Ruyter was ready to lead on the fleet. The English, in spite of the dreadful calamity of the great fire of London, the plague which desolated the city, and a declaration of war on the part of France, prepared boldly for the shock.<sup>b</sup>

RICHER'S ACCOUNT OF THE GREAT FOUR DAYS' BATTLE  
(JUNE 11TH-14TH, 1666)

While Holland was preparing for war with England, England on her side was arming against Holland; eighty-one vessels stood ready in the Thames under the command of Prince Rupert and General Monk, duke of Albemarle.

De Ruyter left Texel the 8th of June, 1666, directing his course toward the coast of England, hoping to find the English fleet there and give them battle. Arriving at the entrance of the straits of Dover, he gave a signal for all the captains to come aboard and addressed them in the following language: "The moment of combat is at hand. We have to deal with an enemy full of pride, and presumptuous, who seeks our destruction; the salvation of Holland, the safety and honour of our women, our children, our families, depend this day on our prudence and valour. Let us efface the

dishonour which we suffered in the defeat of the past year. We shall meet with a vigorous defence; the English are good sailors and good soldiers, but it is for us to conquer or to die. On our side we have justice and may hope for divine protection. Should there be any too cowardly to follow my example they will find a shameful death in avoiding a glorious one." With one voice the captains declared themselves ready to sacrifice themselves for the honour of their country, and then returned to their ships.

The Dutch fleet continued on its way, and cast anchor the 11th of June in the mouth of the Thames. Towards two in the morning the advance guard made known by a signal that the enemy had been sighted; towards eleven the English fleet was seen advancing in order of battle. De Ruyter had sought battle; now was the moment to which he had aspired. With that coolness which always marks the great man, he gave his orders. The officers and soldiers, filled with admiration for their commander, resolved to conquer or perish; but already their confidence in him gave them the premonition of victory. The English fleet continued to advance. Vice-Admiral Tromp, who was in the advance guard, began fighting an hour after mid-day. De Ruyter from his side attacked the enemy with that fierceness which was his custom; his example was followed by all the captains. The English, having the wind on one side, were unable to use some of their guns. The Dutch, on the contrary, made good use of their batteries and crushed the enemy. The fight was sustained with equal valour and obstinacy on all sides. Four hours after noon an English vessel of fifty cannon was sunk by a broadside from De Ruyter. The two enemies fought in this position until five o'clock, when, the English changing their position to avoid the reefs of Flanders, the squadrons of Lieutenant-Admirals Evertsen and De Vries taking advantage of the movement attacked them with such impetuosity that they succeeded in separating them and capturing three vessels.

Meanwhile Monk fought with a courage bordering on despair. At six o'clock the two armies were still fighting and it was only the coming on of night that finally separated the combatants. All parties busied themselves in repairing the damage sustained and preparing to resume the fight. At dawn the next day De Ruyter signalled his lieutenant-admirals and captains to come aboard in order to impress on them the necessity of keeping up with the same valour the fight that was about to recommence. Sunrise revealed the English fleet a league to windward. The two fleets attacked each other with equal intrepidity. De Ruyter on approaching the English drew toward the south in order to stand upon the same tack with them. The two fleets passed one before the other under heavy fire; numbers of vessels were disabled. A calm now rendered them inactive; but at ten o'clock, a fresh wind coming up, the fight continued.

At noon the Dutch were so close that De Ruyter gave the signal to board. This brought on them a terrible fusillade of the English. De Ruyter, fearing that some of his vessels were in the midst of the enemy, decided at once to succour them and penetrate the enemy's fleet with his squadron; his courage brought him through, and there he found Tromp who, with five vessels, had imprudently penetrated to the middle of the English fleet and who would have been inevitably overwhelmed had not De Ruyter come to his assistance. The five vessels were completely disabled, most of the sailors and soldiers, together with several officers, killed, and nearly all the others wounded. De Ruyter drove off the English, brought back the five vessels except one, which had been burned; the other four being useless, he had them towed back to Texel.

The Dutch fleet now gathered round their general and, stimulated by his

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courage, attacked the enemy with so much impetuosity that six of their vessels were sunk and one burned. In this terrible encounter all the attacks of the enemy were directed against De Ruyter; his maintopmast was broken, and fell on the vessel with its flag and pennant. The latter he sent to Van Nes with orders to raise it with his flag and take command until De Ruyter's vessel was repaired. De Ruyter dropped back and Van Nes executed his manœuvres with such prudence and valour that the English gave up the fight. The Dutch pursued the English fleet with all possible speed; the latter used all their experience in their endeavour to reach the Thames, even burning their



THE ARCHERS' PRIZE, SHOWING SEVENTEENTH CENTURY COSTUMES

(After a painting by Bartholomew Van der Helst, 1611-1670)

poor sailing vessels in order that they might not be seized by the Dutch. The *Prince Royal*, carrying ninety-two cannon, commanded by the English vice-admiral George Ayscue, ran aground on a reef called Galloper near the Thames; the admiral used all the accustomed signals calling for aid, but in vain: the English were too terrified to stop. In an instant he was surrounded by the Dutch; recognising the impossibility of defence, he took down his colours. De Ruyter, who in the meantime had repaired his vessel as far as possible, now rejoined his fleet. Fearing that the *Prince Royal* would but prove a burden, he set fire to it and sent Ayscue to the Hague.

Hardly was this expedition achieved when the Dutch saw twenty-five English vessels advancing from the southwest. They were commanded by Prince Rupert, who had detached his squadron in order to collect several vessels at Portsmouth and Plymouth, and then go to the west to await and fight the French who, it had been rumored, were coming to join the Dutch. Not having met them he came to the rescue of the English fleet. As soon as the Dutch saw him they made an attack; he evaded them and joined the



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remnant of the English forces on the evening of the 13th of June. Monk gave him an account of what had passed during the two preceding days. They decided that it would be necessary to fight the next day, and the prince, having the freshest vessels, should lead. The English fleet found itself in possession of sixty-one vessels of war; the Dutch had sixty-four, but they had passed through a conflict of two days and all the crews were fatigued. Their other vessels had returned to Holland with the captured ships to be repaired. De Ruyter, seeing that the English were ready to recommence hostilities, prepared to meet the attack. His courage would not allow him to avoid danger. He relied on his example exciting the officers and soldiers to their best efforts.

The fight commenced on the 14th at eight in the morning. The Dutch ships penetrated the English fleet in three different directions and dispersed some of their vessels. De Ruyter, drawing back, ran to the south; the English stood in for the Dutch. This manœuvre lasted till three; the confusion was terrible and the victory remained balanced during the whole day. A Dutch vice-admiral named Liefde, in command of a vessel of sixty pieces, found himself at the mercy of the vice-admiral of the squadron of Prince Rupert, who commanded a vessel of eighty pieces. De Ruyter, whom nothing escaped, seeing his danger, dispersed the enemy's vessels and drew the attack upon himself. Still the combat raged on all sides. De Ruyter, looking like a lion who had been made furious by the carnage, now made the signal to board. Simultaneously the heroes, Tromp, Meppel, Ban'ert, De Vries, Van Nes, Liefde, Evertsen, etc., attacked the English, pressing them so closely that disorder was created and they were forced to retreat. This was at seven in the evening, after a fight of eleven hours. The Dutch pursued them, but a heavy fog forced De Ruyter to give the signal to rally and retreat. His prudence would not allow him to risk exposing his vessels to collision or the danger of the reefs. He conducted his fleet to Wielingen.

These three encounters have been related in all languages, and all countries accord praise to De Ruyter. All eulogize his prudence, his ability, and his valour. He so disposed his force and so chose his position that the English tried in vain to penetrate his fleet or put it in disorder. His eye was everywhere; no movement of either side escaped him, and his signals to change position or board were always given at the right moment. He never missed an opportunity to pierce his enemy's fleet, double on it, or separate their vessels and sink them. If, through an excess of courage, some of his captains went too far and became the victims of the enemy's fire, he would rescue them with heroic intrepidity; he was the soul of his army and worked the way to victory. The English directed several fire-brands against him in the hope that if they destroyed their admiral, the Dutch might easily be conquered.

This victory was dearly bought by the Dutch.<sup>1</sup> Many of their bravest officers and captains were lost and about eight hundred soldiers and sailors. The number of wounded amounted to 1,150. The English suffered even greater loss; according to the accounts they had 6,000 men killed, among which number were Vice-Admiral Berkeley and a large number of captains. The Dutch had 3,000 prisoners in their ports. The English lost 23 vessels of war, of which 17 were burned or sunk. The other six were taken as prizes by the Dutch.<sup>2</sup>

[<sup>1</sup> This engagement, whether we consider the skill displayed on both sides, the valour and obstinacy of the combatants, or the astonishing physical powers which enabled them to endure such prolonged and excessive fatigue, has never yet found a parallel in history. The English historians, following the old style, date the events of this war ten days earlier than the Dutch, who adopted the new.]

[1666 A.D.]

## THE ENGLISH WIN A VICTORY

In less than three weeks De Ruyter, with the view of taking the enemy, who were not yet ready for sea, by surprise, again set sail towards the English coast. De Witt had been inspired by one Samuel Raven, an English refugee; with the idea that if a landing were made in England, the number of malcontents was so great that the entire overthrow of the present government would be easily accomplished; and, in consequence, the purport of his orders to De Ruyter was in conformity with these views. But the admiral very soon found that the project appeared far more easy of execution at the Hague than at the mouth of the Thames. A fleet of fifty vessels stationed at Queenborough rendered it impossible for the Dutch to advance, except at imminent risk of destruction, as well from the enemy's fire-ships as the dangers of a navigation with which, as the English had removed the buoys and beacons, their pilots were unacquainted.

After cruising for more than a month about the coast, De Ruyter was met August 4th, between the North Foreland and Ostend, by the English fleet of ninety sail under the command of Albemarle, his own being eighty-eight in number. The van of the Dutch, under Evertsen, first engaged with the white squadron of the English, commanded by Sir Thomas Allen, when, in a short but brisk cannonade, Evertsen, whose father, son, and four brothers had perished in the service of their country, was killed, with Hiddes de Vries and Admiral Bankert. The death of these officers spread such confusion and dismay



MICHAEL ADRIAANZOOON DE RUYTER  
(1607-1676)

through the whole squadron that it fell into disorder, and began to retreat under press of sail. De Ruyter meanwhile had followed the van; but a calm (as it was alleged) preventing some of his ships from coming up, himself, with a part only of his squadron, had to sustain the vigorous attack of Albemarle. Tromp, remaining about two miles in the rear, was engaged with Sir Jeremy Smith, when, after a sharp fire, the latter retreated; but, as it was supposed, only with the view of separating Tromp still farther from the middle squadron. Though strict orders had been issued to the whole of the fleet to keep as close as possible to the Admiral's flag, Tromp continued the pursuit, leaving De Ruyter with a few vessels to contend against the whole power of the enemy, whom, however, he kept at bay with incredible prowess until night.

At the dawn of day, August 5th, he found himself with no more than seven ships remaining, which the English, in the firm expectation of capturing, surrounded, twenty-two in number, in the form of a crescent, and opened upon them a terrific fire. Albemarle, determined, if possible, to grace his triumph with the capture or death of his gallant foe, pursued him with unre-

mitting ardour. He first sent a fire-ship against his vessel, which De Ruyter avoided with admirable skill; when several English ships fired upon him together a tremendous broadside which threatened to shiver his vessel to atoms. Then, for a moment, this great man lost the equanimity which was never, before or after, seen to desert him; and in the bitterness of his anguish exclaimed, "Oh, my God! how wretched am I, that amc I<sup>g</sup> so many thousand balls not one will bring me death."

But a proposal from his son-in-law, De Witt, that they should rush in among the enemy and sell their lives as dearly as possible, recalled him to himself. He felt how much his country yet required of him; and resuming his habitual composure, he sustained the fight with unmoved steadiness during the whole of his retreat to Walcheren, a retreat more glorious to him, as it was considered by his contemporaries, than the most brilliant victory. The loss was but trifling either on the side of the conquerors or the vanquished; many of the Dutch captains having retreated in the early part of the action. Of all those who thus misconducted themselves, one only was punished; the rest, protected by the magistrates of the towns, their friends and relatives, were not even deprived of their command. The most pernicious results felt from this defeat were in the open hostility into which it exasperated the animosity between the two great admirals, Tromp and De Ruyter, each of whom bitterly reproached the other as the cause of the calamity; in the divisions it occasioned in the fleet, nearly every individual siding with the one or the other; and the consequent loss of the services of the former to his country. The circumstance of Tromp's having, on the morning of the battle, held a long interview with the lord of Sommelsdyk, a zealous adherent of the Orange and English party, excited a suspicion in the states of Holland that the motives of his conduct lay deeper than a personal enmity towards the admiral, and they therefore prevailed with the states-general to deprive him of his commission; a proceeding, however, unjust in the highest degree towards Tromp, if, as his partisans asserted, he was carried away in the pursuit of the English by the ardour of combat; a supposition far more conformable to his character than that he should have acted from any impulse of treachery.

The states, probably, were the more liable to be impressed with suspicions of this nature, in consequence of the discovery, about this time, of a plot formed by one Du Buat, together with two magistrates of Rotterdam, Kievit and Van der Horst, the former a member of the council of state, for obtaining a peace with England, as the readiest means of procuring the elevation of the prince of Orange to the office of captain-general.<sup>e</sup>

#### THE PEACE OF BREDA

The king of France hastened forward in this crisis to the assistance of the republic; and De Witt, by a deep stroke of policy, amused the English with negotiation while a powerful fleet was fitted out. It suddenly appeared in the Thames<sup>1</sup> under the command of De Ruyter, and all England was thrown into consternation. The Dutch took Sheerness, and burned many ships of war; almost insulting the capital itself in their predatory incursion. Had the French power joined that of the provinces at this time, and invaded England, the most fatal results to that kingdom might have taken place. But the alarm soon subsided with the disappearance of the hostile fleet;

[<sup>1</sup> De Ruyter sailed as far up the Thames as Gravesend, and threw London into great terror.]

[1667-1672 A. D.]

and the signing of the Peace of Breda, on the 10th of July, 1667, extricated Charles from his present difficulties. The island of Polorone was restored to the Dutch, and the point of maritime superiority was, on this occasion, undoubtedly theirs.

While Holland was preparing to indulge in the luxury of national repose, the death of Philip IV of Spain and the startling ambition of Louis XIV brought war once more to their very doors, and soon even forced it across the threshold of the republic. The king of France, setting at nought his solemn renunciation at the Peace of the Pyrenees of all claims to any part of the Spanish territories in right of his wife, who was daughter of the late king, found excellent reasons (for his own satisfaction) to invade a material portion of that declining monarchy. Well prepared by the financial and military foresight of Colbert for his great design, he suddenly poured a powerful army, under Turenne, into Brabant and Flanders; quickly over-ran and took possession of these provinces; and, in the space of three weeks, added Franche-Comté to his conquests. Europe was in universal alarm at these unexpected measures; and no state felt more terror than the republic of the United Provinces. The interest of all countries seemed now to require a coalition against the power which had abandoned the house of Austria only to settle on France. The first measure to this effect was the signing of the triple league between Holland, Sweden, and England, at the Hague, on the 13th of January, 1668. But this proved to be one of the most futile confederations on record. Charles fell in with the designs of his pernicious, and on this occasion purchased, cabinet, called the Cabal; and he entered into a secret treaty with France, in the very teeth of his other engagements. Sweden was dissuaded from the league by the arguments of the French ministers; and Holland in a short time found itself involved in a double war with its late allies.

A base and piratical attack on the Dutch Smyrna fleet, by a large force under Sir Robert Holmes, on the 13th of March, 1672, was the first overt act of treachery on the part of the English government. The attempt completely failed, through the prudence and valour of the Dutch admirals; and Charles reaped only the double shame of perfidy and defeat. He instantly issued a declaration of war against the republic, on reasoning too palpably false to require refutation, and too frivolous to merit record to the exclusion of more important matter from our narrow limits.<sup>b</sup>

Notwithstanding the secrecy attending Louis XIV's negotiations, De Witt had been uneasy; always favourable toward the alliance with France, he had sought to calm the latter's irritation against Holland growing out of her belief that Holland was the instigator of the Triple Alliance. Jan De Witt had defended his country with haughty modesty: "I am not sure," he said, "whether the encounters that latterly have brought the important affairs of Europe to be transacted in Holland are to be regarded as a benefit or a misfortune. But in regard to the partiality toward Spain of which we are suspected, it should be said that never can we forget our aversion for that nation; an aversion suckled in with our mother's milk — souvenir of a hatred nourished by so much bloodshed, so many protracted struggles. For my part, no power could turn my inclinations toward Spain."

Hatred against Spain was not, however, so general in Holland as De Witt pretended; and the internal dissensions, carefully fostered by France, were gradually undermining the aristocratic and republican authority, to build up the influence of the partisans of the house of Nassau. Patriotically far-seeing and sagacious, Jan De Witt had long cherished a presentiment of

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the defeat of his cause; and it was with great care that he had brought up the heir of the stadholders, William of Nassau, the natural leader of his adversaries. It was this young prince whom the policy of Louis XIV opposed to De Witt in the councils of the United Provinces, thus strengthening in advance the indomitable enemy who was to triumph over his glory and conquer him by defeats.

It was decided to send an envoy to Spain for the purpose of negotiating a defensive alliance. Spain at first regarded the overtures of Holland with a cold and doubtful eye. The dread of French invasion, however, decided them. The defensive alliance between Spain and Holland was accomplished, and all effort on the part of France had been powerless to break it.

Jan De Witt kept up his negotiations; the treaty of Charles II, with France remained a close secret, and the Dutch believed they could count on the good will of England. Charles II, profiting by the necessity of the states to serve the cause of his nephew, the prince of Orange, had demanded his appointment to the captain-generalship, held hitherto by his ancestors. The prince had already been recognised as first noble of Zealand, and he had obtained entrée to the council. Jan De Witt turned against him the votes of the state of Holland, still preponderant in the republic.

"The grand pensionary," writes De Pomponne,<sup>h</sup> "has nearly smothered the murmurs and the complaints raised against him. He prefers any peril to the re-establishment of the prince of

Orange — his re-establishment on the recommendation of the king of England. He believed the republic would suffer a double yoke under the control of a leader who, as captain-general, would aspire to the acquisition of all the powers of his fathers, and this by aid of an ally under suspicion."

The grand pensionary was not deceived; in the spring of 1672 all Louis XIV's negotiations were concluded; his army was ready: at last he was about to crush the little state that so long had stood between him and the fulfilment of his projects.<sup>i</sup>



JAN DE WITT  
1625-1672)

#### WAR WITH LOUIS XIV (1672)

Louis soon advanced with his army, and the contingents of Münster and Cologne, his allies amounting altogether to nearly 170,000 men, commanded by Condé, Turenne, Luxemburg, and others of the greatest generals of France. Never was any country less prepared than were the United Provinces to



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resist this formidable aggression. Their army was as naught; their long cessation of military operations by land having totally demoralised that once invincible branch of their forces. No general existed who knew any thing of the practice of war. Their very stores of ammunition had been delivered over, in the way of traffic, to the enemy who now prepared to overwhelm them. De Witt was severely, and not quite unjustly blamed for having suffered the country to be thus taken by surprise, utterly defenceless, and apparently without resource. Envy of his uncommon merit aggravated the just complaints against his error. But, above all things, the popular affection to the young prince threatened, in some great convulsion, the overthrow of the pensionary, who was considered eminently hostile to the illustrious house of Orange.<sup>b</sup>

The prince of Orange possessed neither forces nor authority equal to those of his opponent. De Ruyter was hard put to it for ammunition in the struggle already entered upon against the French and English fleets. But it was not by sea or through his lieutenants that Louis proposed to conquer; he arrived in person on the banks of the Rhine, to march straight at the heart of Holland. Jan De Witt proposed to evacuate the Hague and carry the seat of government to Amsterdam; the prince of Orange abandoned Utrecht, which was immediately occupied by the French.

A deputation was sent, June 22nd, to the king's headquarters to sue for peace. The same day, Jan De Witt was stabbed in the Hague by an assassin, while the city of Amsterdam, almost resolved to surrender and ready to send her delegates to the French king, turned suddenly about and took up the rôle of resistance. All the sluice-gates were opened and the dikes broken: Amsterdam floated on the bosom of the tide.

Louis' ambition would not allow of his accepting the propositions of the deputies sent him by the states-general; he desired altogether to exterminate the Dutch: he exacted in addition the cession of south Gelderland, the island of Bommel, twenty-four million francs, the re-establishment of the Catholic religion, and an annual envoy charged with thanks to the king for having for the second time brought peace to the Low Countries. This was going too far; while the deputies pondered, death at their hearts, the Dutch nation arose.

Since the beginning of the war the party of the house of Orange had not ceased to gain ground. Jan De Witt had been accused of being the author of all the country's misfortunes. The people noisily demanded the re-establishment of the stadholdership, lately abolished by the presumptuously named Perpetual Edict. Dordrecht, the home of the De Witts, had given the signal for insurrection. Cornelis De Witt, confined to his house by illness, had been prevailed upon by his family to sign the municipal act which would destroy his brother's work. The contagion spread from city to city, from province to province; on July 4th, the states-general named William of Orange stadholder, captain-general, and admiral of the union: the national instinct had fixed upon the saviour of the country and eagerly tendered him the reins of state.

William of Orange was barely twenty-two years old when revolutionary fortune set him all at once at the head of an enemy-ridden, devastated, nearly overwhelmed country; but his mind and soul were equal to the difficult task set before him. He haughtily rejected all propositions brought in the name of the king by Pieter De Groot. All Holland followed the example of Amsterdam: the dikes were broken; the troops of the electors of Brandenburg and of Saxony advanced to the aid of the United Provinces, and the emperor

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signed with these two princes a defensive alliance for the maintenance of the treaties of Westphalia, the Pyrenees, and Aix-la-Chapelle. Louis, recalled to France by his interests and his pleasures, left the command of his army to Turenne and departed.

GUIZOT'S ACCOUNT OF THE FATE OF THE PROTHES DE WITT

Like his country melancholy and defeated, Jan De Witt resigned his office as pensionary counsellor to Holland. He was immediately replaced by Gaspard Fagel, passionately devoted to the prince of Orange. Cornelis

De Witt, so lately united with his brother in the public confidence, was now dragged to the Hague like a criminal, upon the accusation by a wretched barber of having conspired for the assassination of the prince of Orange. In vain did the magistrates of Dordrecht claim their right of jurisdiction over their citizen: Cornelis De Witt was put to the torture to extract a confession. "They cannot make me confess what I have never even dreamed of," he answered, while the pulleys were dislocating his joints. His judges, confounded, heard him repeat the ode of Horace:

*Justum et tenacem propositi virum.*

At the end of three hours they carried him, broken but unconquered, back to his dungeon. The court condemned him to banishment.



HALL OF THE KNIGHTS, NEAR THE DEATH-PLACE OF DE WITTS

His accuser Tichelaer was not yet satisfied. Soon, at his instigation, crowds gathered around the prison, cursing the judges for their clemency. "They are the real traitors," cried Tichelaer: "but let us first be avenged upon those already within our grasp." Jan had been lured to the prison by a message purporting to come from his brother. In vain his daughter implored him to ignore it.

"What do you here?" cried Cornelis, upon seeing his brother. "Did you not send for me?" "Certainly not!" "Then we are lost," said Jan De Witt calmly.

The tumult outside increased. So far a body of cavalry had succeeded in maintaining order. All at once a rumour was afloat that the peasants of the surrounding country were on their way to the Hague to pillage it: the estates ordered the count de Tilly to march against them. The brave soldier demanded a written order: "I obey," he said; "but the brothers are doomed."

Scarcely had the troops departed when the doors of the prison were forced. The ruward, torture-spent, was stretched upon his cot, his brother seated

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beside him reading aloud from the Bible. The crowd precipitated itself into the room crying, "Traitors, prepare to die!" Both were dragged out. They embraced. Cornelis, struck from behind, fell to the bottom of the stairs. His brother, running into the street to defend him, received a blow in the face from a pick. The ruward was already dead. The assassins flung themselves upon Jan, who, losing nothing of his calm and courage, raised his hands to heaven and opened his mouth to pray, when a last blow felled him. "The Perpetual Edict is down!" shrieked the assassins, heaping insults and maledictions upon the two corpses. It was not till nightfall, and after infinite trouble in recognising the disfigured countenances of his sons, that the unhappy Jacob De Witt was able to carry away the bodies.

William of Orange arrived the next day at the Hague, too late for his own glory and for the punishment of the obscure assassins, whom he allowed to escape. The constructors of the plot obtained appointments and rewards.

During twenty years Jan De Witt had stood for the noblest expression of the traditional policy of his country. Long faithful to the French alliance, he attempted to arrest Louis XIV in his dangerous successes. Conscious of the perils to come, he overlooked those at hand. He believed too much and for too long in the influence of negotiations and the possibility of regaining the friendship of France. That which he had hoped for his country escaped him within and without: Holland was crushed by France, and the aristocratic republic was defeated by the democratic monarchy. Between the two he was unable to divine that constitutional monarchy, freely chosen, which should gain for his country the independence, the prosperity, and the order for which he had laboured.

As fearless and far-seeing a politician as Coligny, like him twice struck by the assassin, Jan De Witt retains his place in history as the unique model of a great republican leader, honest and capable, proud and modest, up to the time when other "united provinces," struggling like Holland for their liberty, furnished him a rival to the purity of his glory in the person of their governor, General George Washington.

In its brutal ingratitude the instinct of the Dutch people clearly divined the situation. Jan De Witt would have been annihilated in the struggle against France; William of Orange, prince, politician, and soldier, was able to save the necks of Europe and of his own country from the yoke of Louis XIV.<sup>2</sup>

