

*John De Witt; or, Twenty Years' Interregnum in the Stadtholdership of the Seventeenth Century.*¹ By M. ESQUIROU DE PARIEU, Vice-President of the Imperial Council of State, Member of the Institute of France, &c. &c. (Translated by Frederick Hendriks, Esq., Actuary of the Globe Insurance Company.)

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THE history of the United Provinces, and of Holland especially, from the close of the Spanish rule down to the establishment of the modern monarchy of the Netherlands, is distinguished for its manifestation of a permanent struggle between different opposite principles. Liberty and authority, municipal principle and state principle, republic and monarchy, the spirit of federal isolation and that of centralization, appear to give battle to each other upon a territory itself with difficulty defended from the waves of the ocean by the watchful industry of its inhabitants.

The municipal element, appears, nevertheless, as the primitive kernel of Dutch society. "The towns of Holland," says a modern historian,² "were not, like those of other nations, mere sections of the State, for the State itself was rather an aggregation of towns, each of which constituted a distinct republic, providing for its separate defence, governed by its own laws, having its separate courts of justice and separate financial administration. The legislative sovereignty of the whole nation vested in the cities, which formed, in their collective capacity, the assembly of the States."

The internal administration of these towns was composed of a senate; of two, three, or four burgomasters, constituting what was called the *Wethouderschap*; and of a certain number of *échevins*, or sheriffs, who exercised judicial power. The *schout*, or bailiff, represented the authority of the count.

The burgomasters and sheriffs were nominated by the grand council of the town (*Vroedschap*). The composition of this grand council varied much in the different towns. At Hoorn, the grand council comprised all the inhabitants worth a capital of 250 nobles; at Dordrecht it only consisted of life members, who were recruited by election. In the constitution of this town, which was the most aristocratic of any in Holland, there was but one burgomaster, nominated annually.³

¹ It is known that there was, in the eighteenth century, a second interruption of the stadtholdership, from 1702 to 1747.

² Davies: *History of Holland*, vol. i., p. 76, *et seq.*; Analysis of the Dutch Constitution prior to 1579.

³ This internal organization of the towns of Holland is not without analogy with the

There were, however, to be found in the States of the Netherlandish Provinces, besides the town deputies, certain deputies of the nobility, or *ridderschap*. But this equestrian order, the name of which reminds us of that which still exists in Prussia,¹ does not seem to have ever played either a very considerable or distinct part in the affairs of the United Provinces.

The same remark applies to the ecclesiastical order. In Holland and Overysse, the clergy had never figured in the States. It had been represented, in Zealand, by the abbot of Saint Nicholas; in Brabant,² by the fourteen abbots; at Utrecht, by the five chapters.³

The States of the Provinces had no functionaries, properly so called, unless we except a secretary and a pensionary. Nevertheless, their power was considerable; "And thus these provinces," says Meteren, "have been in all times (when they had no competent lords or princes, or only such as were still minors or uninaugurated) governed by the said States. So much so, that we may term their government *aristocratie* or *puissance de peu de gens*; for although their sovereigns—governing well, and according to their privileges—had such authority that they could do as they would, provided they did well, nevertheless, if they were governing ill, the States had their eye upon them, to keep them in check; and the common people, who consisted of trades and confraternities, and were governed by their wardens, looked after the States; and this is the reason why some call this government a mixed government."⁴

The influence of the House of Orange, and of the continuity of offices which had been delegated to it, since the time when William I. had been declared, in 1576, admiral and stadtholder of Holland, Zealand, and other places,⁵ gradually modified the political constitution of the United Provinces. This House of Nassau, which produced a remarkable succession of able princes, devoted to their country, at length arrived at the possession,

existence of large and small councils in the organization of the Swiss towns. The instructive work of M. Cherbulliez, *La Démocratie en Suisse*, may be advantageously consulted on this head.

¹ *Ritterschaft, rittergut*.

² In 1609, Brabant was divided between the United Provinces and the Spanish Netherlands.

³ See Davies, vol. i., p. 85. Emanuel de Meteren: *Histoire des Pays Bas, traduit du Flamand*; La Haye, 1618.

⁴ Mr. Davies attributes to the example of Holland the first ideas of civil and religious liberty introduced into England (vol. i., p. 1). Harington, according to Toland, used to say that he had learnt in Holland the sense of the fundamental maxims of political science.

⁵ Kerroux: *Abrégé de l'Histoire de Hollande*, p. 322. See also *ibid.*, p. 348.

through its several branches, of the stadtholdership, or executive power, of the seven United Provinces.¹ The government of these provinces, remaining republican in name, inclined in reality more and more towards monarchy. The commercial spirit of the towns, legitimately represented by the States, struggled, however, against the development of the power of the stadtholdership, and kept up, in Holland especially, the republican principle. Families which had long been invested with local magistracies, liked to be conservative of the institutions of a peaceful, economical government, that allowed, through its forms, the preservation of their influence. But the military, the ministers of the reformed religion (whom the republican party strictly confined to their ecclesiastical functions,² and whom the House of Nassau knew how to attach to its cause³), the landed nobility of the eastern provinces, and the section of the people which was excluded from any participation in the municipal government, emulated each other in supporting the power of a family which, by its alliances with the dynasties of Europe, augmented the prestige it had based upon the services it had rendered to the cause of national and religious independence. The rivalries of the federal Government, also, gave other supports to the House of Orange.

The province of Holland exercised a specially preponderating influence in the confederation of the United Provinces. Paying, of itself alone, 57 per cent. of the common charges, and receiving the deputies of the other provinces upon its territory, Holland was, to borrow a common expression in the Swiss Confederation, a kind of permanent *vorort*, the influence of which was such that the great deeds worked out by the United Provinces are frequently confounded, in the recollections and appreciations of history, with the acts of Holland singly. The advocate, or pensionary-councillor, of Holland, was, even from the necessities of his post, called to play an important part in the States-General, where he had to take a place in the name of his province.⁴

¹ "Maurice, stadtholder of Holland and of Zealand, had obtained, in addition, the stadtholdership of Guelderland, Utrecht, and Overijssel, in 1591, after the decease of the Count de Nieuenaar" (Kerroux, p. 385). "The stadtholdership of Friesland, and that of Groningen, were customarily held, in the seventeenth century, by another branch of the House of Nassau. Nevertheless, it appears that Frederick Henry and William II. were invested with the stadtholdership of Groningen" (Kerroux, pp. 590 and 599).

² Emmanuel Van der Hoeven. *Leven en Dood van Cornelis en Johan De Witt*, t. ii, p. 17; Amsterdam, 1708.

³ "The devotion of the ministers of religion to the House of Orange had declared itself from the days of Maurice" (Kerroux, p. 429).

⁴ See articles 25 and 21 of the *Instructions for the Post of Pensionary-Councillor*, at two different epochs, quoted textually by Van der Hoeven, t. i., pp. 17 and 112. In terms of the 1st article of the second of these instructions, the pensionary-councillor had

As Holland, from its riches, its population, and the importance of its cities, was the natural centre of commercial and republican policy in the United Provinces, it was not astonishing that the provinces which struggled against its preponderance should attach themselves to Orangeism as well as to the more natural counterpoise of the influence of Holland; and, on the other side, it was easy to understand that Holland should strive to weaken a federal bond which denied to its vote, in general affairs, a weight *legally* superior to that of the vote of the other provinces confederated with her. "This special interest," says M. Thorbecke, in giving an account of the work of M. Simons on John De Witt, and in touching upon the state of debate after the death of William II., "overtopped the question of the reinstalment of the princes of Orange in their general and provincial functions—a question usually placed in the first rank, because it is common to confound later periods with those which now occupy us."

Such were the chief elements of disagreement in a political organization full of energy and full of incoherency, and as replete with vitality as with irregularity.

Elective by right, hereditary by fact, the domination of the House of Orange must have experienced, more sensitively than a genuine dynasty, the inconveniences of the interruption which troubles every reigning family on the occurrence of minorities.

In the middle of the seventeenth century, a minority without a possible regency, since the stadtholdership was then an elective personal and annual post, coincided with the advent to administrations of an eminent minister of Holland, and also with a sufficiently active reaction against the encroachments of the last stadtholder. This episode, which has been often, but briefly, treated upon in our historical literature,¹ offers, perhaps, a particular interest to the men of our own time, who, in circumstances immensely different, have, nevertheless, also seen, like the Hollanders of the seventeenth century, republican ideas and monarchical ideas struggling against each other in their own country, and who have with their own eyes, or by the testimony of recent history, assisted several times in France in the waking-up of the principle of political heirship arising from revolutionary attempts and agitations, and being born again, so to speak, from its ashes.

William II., the third successor of William the Taciturn in

to be acquainted at least with the Latin and French languages, and to belong to the reformed religion. See, also, the German translation of the work of Simons upon *John De Witt and his Times*, t. i., pp. 31, 221, 228, *et seq.*

¹ See the article by M. Mignet in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1841.

the stadtholdership, had, in 1647, replaced his father, Frederick Henry; and, from the very beginning of his power, had seemed to draw from his marriage with Mary Stuart, of England, the moving spring of an ambition partaking in some measure of a *sovereign* character.

On the 3rd July, 1650, vexed by the intention of the States of Holland to send back a large part of the army, and irritated especially against certain towns which had badly received him in an excursion he had made to obtain from them the repudiation of the opposition from the States, he resolved to summon before him, and to arrest in his room, six members of the States who were opposed to his policy and belonged to localities of which he thought he had reason to complain.

These were James De Witt, ex-burgomaster of Dordrecht; John De Waal, burgomaster, and Albert Ruyl, pensionary of Haarlem; John Duyst Van Voorhout, burgomaster of Delft; Keyzer, pensionary of Hoorn; and Nicholas Stellingwerf, pensionary of Medenblick. They were conducted to the fortress of Louvenstein, already sadly known through the incarceration of Hogerbeets and of Grotius, under the stadtholdership of Maurice; and they only went out of it, some months subsequently, upon resignation of their offices.¹

James De Witt, who belonged to a family of the burgher aristocracy of Dordrecht,² seems to have played some part, not only in home affairs, but probably also in foreign negotiations interesting his country; and one of his relations, Andrew De Witt, was for some time advocate of Holland, after the imprisonment of Barneveldt.³ He had two sons, destined to represent with honour the party which had received a blow in his person, and in the minds of whom he had probably nourished from infancy the excitement of his own resentment.⁴

Cornelius De Witt was born on the 15th June, 1623; and John De Witt on the 17th September, 1625. The latter, remarkable from his infancy for precocious talent and deep scientific study, completed his education by voyages abroad, and by the apprenticeship of the bar.⁵ He was successively appointed, in 1650,

¹ Davies, t. i., pp. 526 and 691.

² The particle "de," in Dutch, corresponds with our article "le"; and "van" with our particle "de."

³ See what is said of the journey of James De Witt in Sweden, and of the relations which he had at Lubeck with the ambassador of France, Chanut, in the *Recueil des Lettres de Négotiations de Jean De Witt*, French translation, t. i., pp. 120 and 343. Van Hall: *Lofrede of De Witt*, p. 57.

⁴ "Remember," said he to them, "the prison of Louvenstein!" (Kerroux, p. 655.)

⁵ Van Hall: *Lofrede of De Witt*, pp. 59 and 70.

pensionary of the town of Dordrecht, and, in 1653, after the decease of Adrian Paauw, Seigneur de Heemstede, pensionary-councillor of Holland.¹ He was invested, when 28 years old, with that kind of tribuneship which had cost Barneveldt his life, and which the predecessor of Paauw, James Cats, had relinquished with tears of joy, kneeling in the midst of the Assembly of the States, to thank heaven aloud at going out of office without misfortune.²

No one had contested John De Witt's election, "on account of the perilous present time," writes a contemporary.³

The stadtholder, William II., had died a little after the arrest of the six deputies of the States, leaving a posthumous son, the celebrated William III., born 4th November, 1650, one week after the death of his father. William Frederick, cousin of the young prince, stadtholder of Friesland and Groningen,⁴ not being accepted in the same capacity by the five other provinces, the stadtholdership was there in reality vacant.

In a constitution where power was almost continually balanced between the stadtholder and the pensionary-councillor of Holland—the latter filling to a certain extent the part of the accustomed leader of the States of this province, and often also of the States-General—such a position enveloped the germ of a decisive and almost sovereign influence on the part of the pensionary-councillor, and on that of the province he represented. Thus one sees, after the death of William II., the States of Holland immediately laying hands on great authority. They urged a meeting at the Hague of a great assembly of delegates from all the provinces—an assemblage which settled several questions, raised by the absence of the stadtholder, relating to differences between the different provinces, to religion and to the militia.⁵ So far as related to the internal administration of their provinces, the States of Holland allotted to themselves, or conferred upon the towns, the nomination to various employments previously entrusted to the stadtholder.⁶

A sort of interregnum began. What gives to this historical interval a special interest is, that it is entirely filled with the

¹ Emmanuel Van der Hoeven, t. i., p. 14. We say "pensionary-councillor," and not "pensionary of the council"; following a very pertinent note, as it seems to us, of the German translator of the work of M. Simons, part i., p. 221.

² Cats was a poet surnamed the Dutch La Fontaine.

³ Thurloe, vol. i., p. 359.

⁴ The stadtholdership of Groningen, with which Maurice, Frederick Henry, and William II. had been invested (Kerroux, pp. 529, 590, and 599), was reunited with that of Friesland, after the death of William II., in the person of William Frederick (Kerroux, p. 631). They both passed to his son Henry Casimir, in 1664 (Kerroux, p. 718). The grandson of the latter joined the stadtholdership of Guelderland to the other two, in 1722, and became stadtholder-general of the seven provinces in 1747.

⁵ Davies, pp. 700 to 707.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 696.

history of one man. The pensionary-councillor, John De Witt, re-elected quinquennially in that capacity from 1653 down to his death, thus personified, until 1672, the semi-republican government of which he was the chief; and the transient character of which was attested by this very personification, which identified it, so to speak, with the skill and the position of a single man.

External events seemed to favour the development of the power of John De Witt.

The head of the king of England, Charles I., had fallen upon the scaffold of Whitehall, 30th January, 1649. The prince of Orange was, through his mother, the grandson of the sovereign immolated by the revolutionary passions which agitated Great Britain. He had received in his cradle, in 1653, the ribbon of the garter, which had been conferred on him by his uncle, Charles II., a Pretender, exiled upon the continent. The policy of republican England was interested that the stadtholdership should not be aggrandized for the profit of Charles's nephew in the republic of the United Provinces.

Already the coldness of the Dutch towards the Commonwealth of England, the bad reception given to the British ambassadors by the Orange party,¹ the exigencies of Puritan passion, which desired to force upon the two republics a union opposed by the diversity of the interests, the traditions, and the nationalities of these two countries, had lit up, in 1652, a disastrous war, in which De Witt, upon his accession to power, found his country engaged.

When the sufferings of the United Provinces, after a glorious resistance, made them seek that peace which was concluded by the treaty of Westminster, 15th April, 1654, Cromwell profited by the circumstance to lower, as much as depended upon him, in the United Provinces, the power of a house allied with that of the Stuarts, and whose active and persevering party skilfully made use of all the occurrences, and profited from the enmities, of the struggle²—as, later on, when Holland was at war with Charles II., this same party, we advance, from that moment knew how to work to its own profit the desire for peace.

The Act of Exclusion of the 4th May, 1654, voted by the province of Holland alone, on the demand of Cromwell, and as a condition of the peace previously signed, decreed that the young prince of Orange should be for ever shut out from the posts of stadtholder and of captain-general and admiral. The violation of

¹ Walter Harris, p. 2. Van der Hoeven, t. i., pp. 29 to 32.

² Davies, p. 721.

the federal constitution, by this treaty of an isolated province with a foreign power; the injustice of an exclusion thus declared, to the prejudice of an infant of four years old; the imprudence of this engagement in the face of a party of English royalists; and, finally, the renunciation by this interdict of a part of the national sovereignty, have naturally been made a subject of reproach against De Witt, but can only be really laid to his charge so far as relates to a share of the responsibility, which is difficult to determine, and, perhaps, does not even exist. The initiative of this requirement belonged, in point of fact, to Cromwell; and Holland, when she agreed to it, had suffered considerably from war. She had lost her great seaman, Martin Tromp. Three thousand houses, it is said, had become empty at Amsterdam.¹ Nevertheless, if nothing proves that De Witt wished for the Act of Exclusion—if it even appears that he sought to avoid it or to modify its terms²—the foundation of this Act was in agreement with the inner leaning of his policy; and when, after the fall of the Cromwell family, which took place in 1659, the cancelment of the clause of exclusion had been carried out, in 1662, in accordance with Charles II.,³ it was only to be very soon replaced; and in 1667, by an Act having the same purview and the same object—namely, the perpetual edict—which, as a spontaneous act of sovereignty on the part of the province of Holland, abolished forever the stadtholdership, and thus sapped, at its base, the future of the young prince of Orange.

Whilst the policy of Holland was developing itself in the direction of a lessening of the power of the House of Orange, it is interesting to observe the pertinacity and life of the sympathies which surrounded the young collateral offshoot of the *father of his country*.

The heir, under age, of the prince of Orange, had none of the prerogatives of a sovereign. He was, however, of much higher consideration than the heir of a great citizen; and it is interesting to notice how many sentiments of hope and respect already surrounded the cradle of this child, who had for godfathers the States of Holland and Zealand, as well as the towns of Delft, Leyden, and Amsterdam, and whose predecessor had himself been invested, in 1631, and at the age of only 5 years, with the reversionary succession to the great offices of his father.⁴ In June, 1653, the

¹ Kerroux, p. 662.

² See his correspondence with Boreel, in the *Lettres et Négotiations*, t. i., pp. 129, 142, 120. On the other side, see the passage in *d'Estrades*, quoted by Kerroux, p. 704.

³ German translation of Simons, t. i., p. 97.

⁴ Kerroux, p. 569.

young William, then aged under 3 years, was taken to Bréda, and passed, in a boat upon the Meuse, before the town of Dordrecht. His nurse lifted him up in her arms to show to the people along the river shore. Many followed, crying "Long live the young prince!" and at night there was great excitement in the town.¹ Shortly after, on the 6th of August of the same year, the arrival of the young prince at the Hague also made a lively impression on the public opinion.² About the same period, certain provinces—Friesland, Zealand, and Groningen—demanded that the young prince should be invested with the offices of captain and admiral-general, upon the supposition that the count of Nassau, stadtholder of Friesland and Groningen, would administer them in his name.³ Three years later, the States of Holland were uneasy at receiving a petition in which the young prince, then aged only 6 years, was styled by the title of "his Highness," without any other addition. The States wished, through a rather puerile distinction, that the preamble of Acts done in the name of the young prince should bear these words—"M. the Prince of Orange;" and that the title of "Highness" should only be made use of in the body of the Act, and subordinate, as it were, to the preceding designation.⁴

Such was the state of mind in Holland at the beginning of John De Witt's government. The republican party was dominant in the country, but from an accidental and transient reason. Uneasy and uncertain before the cradle of a child whose name had remained popular, it aspired rather to keep within bounds, than to suppress, the influence of the House of Orange.

We do not here discover anything of that which characterised the political discords of England in the seventeenth century and of France in the eighteenth century. Doubtless, we must attribute this to the fact of political discussion being free, in Holland, from those questions of religion which were mixed up, to a very unequal extent, in the struggles just alluded to; and also to the circumstance of democratic agitation having had quite another object in that country. If a few military men or courtiers were there interested in the existence of the stadtholdership, the municipal and

¹ Van der Hoeven, i, p. 41.

² Kerroux, p. 671. The letter inserted in Thurloe's *State Papers* (i. p. 391) has reference to this incident. It relates that the house of John De Witt was nearly being pillaged, and that the windows of it were broken by the mob.

³ Thorbecke, *loco citato*.

⁴ Van der Hoeven, i. p. 87. The title of "Highness" was given, for the first time, to Frederick Henry, by the king of France. The stadtholder had previously only borne the title of "Excellency" (Kerroux, p. 581).

trading aristocracy obtained, on the other hand, an advantage in support of their own party from its suppression. The republican party was not popular in Holland, and it did not possess the attractions to which the sympathies of the masses sometimes give birth.

As to the religious question, there was nothing, in the United Provinces, during the second half of the seventeenth century, at all analogous to the ecclesiastical dissensions which gave play to passion in Great Britain towards the same period. If a religious dissent did serve as a pretext for the death of Barneveldt—if even the ministers of the State religion showed themselves in general favourable to the descendants of the founder of national and protestant independence, the division of theological opinions in Holland, in the time of John De Witt, had no longer the importance which is needful to arouse or give excuse for acts of violence.

It was natural, under these circumstances, that the popular sentiment should not second, in any respect, the republican innovation inaugurated around the cradle of an orphan; but it happened, rather under special events, that sedition furthered the cause of Orangeism against the municipal oligarchies; and, on another side, the moderate and lukewarm republicanism of the Dutch burghers found successively as little sympathy from the English of the revolution as from the restored Stuarts.

After having noticed the relations between Netherlandish Orangeism and republicanism, it is curious to observe how the fate of the two opposite political principles is bound up with the events embraced in the government of John De Witt, and which seem to divide themselves into three principal periods—before, during, and after, the war against Charles II., which occupies the intermediate epoch.

The history of John De Witt, during these various epochs, presents itself under two aspects, which are distinct, although mutually connected. In following the diplomatic, administrative, and military events which took place under the government of the pensionary-councillor, we must never lose sight of the home policy of his party—having for its object the modification of the constitution of the country in a republican direction, and the weakening of the traditions of the stadtholdership. All is in unison in this regard, and even its external policy reacted in a decisive and final manner upon the result of the political struggle fought in the very bosom of the country.

Nominated pensionary-councillor in 1653, and having succeeded the following year in putting an end to the war against

England, the first hostilities of which extended back to the 29th May, 1652, John De Witt held, for ten years, the helm of public affairs, in the midst of a sea almost free from peril. The prince of Orange was still a child, and the United Provinces were at peace with the two powers whose hostility could most menace their existence—namely, France and Great Britain.

The most important events of the government of John De Witt during this period are, financial reforms at home, wars against Sweden and Portugal, and frequent mediations of the pensionary-councillor in the differences between some of the United Provinces.

The operation of conversion of the perpetual rents, which was discussed in France for several years during the reign of Louis Phillippe, and which has been successfully carried out by the Government of the Prince-President in 1852, had already, from the first half of the seventeenth century, preoccupied Dutch financiers thus early versed in the practice of public credit, the teachings and experience of which William III. carried to England at a later period.¹

The conversion of perpetual rents at 16 years' purchase, as was then the expression—that is to say, from the rate of $6\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. into 20 years' purchase—that is to say, to the rate of 5 per cent.—had been carried into operation in Holland, in 1640, and imitated immediately in the finances of the Confederation of the United Provinces.² John De Witt caused it to be renewed in the case which concerned the debt of the Confederation, as well as that of Holland, by converting the rents at 5 per cent. interest into 4 per cents. The resolution of the States of Holland, adopted upon his proposition, is dated 7th August, 1655. Its terms show³ that it was a *bond fide* conversion, with an offer of repayment to such creditors as might not accept the reduction of their interest, and that it was not, as M. Rossi⁴ has viewed it, a forced reduction.

This measure was combined with a sinking-fund system, applied to the debt of the province of Holland. The interest saved by the conversion was to be set aside, with its accumulation at compound interest, for the redemption of the converted debt.⁵ It

¹ Garnier: *Elémens de Finance*, p. 114.

² *Mémoires de Jean De Witt*, Edition of 1709, p. 312. Davies i., p. 677.

³ Van der Hoeven, i., p. 78.

⁴ *Cours d'Economie Politique* iv., p. 356.

⁵ Van der Hoeven, i., p. 76. It is enunciated in the *Letters of John De Witt*, iii., p. 101, and in Kerroux's work, p. 622, that this conversion of rents produced a saving of fourteen millions of florins per annum; but if the debt of Holland consisted of one hundred and forty millions, as is stated in the pretended *Mémoires de Jean De Witt*,

is in relation to this that M. Rossi has, with reason, attributed to Holland the invention of the sinking-fund process for the redemption of public debts. Subsequently, a deduction, which appears to have affected rather the form of a tax, reduced the interest of the State rents from 4 to $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.¹ Thus we find, in this small country, where the *société anonyme* was also invented, and where moveable property contributed largely to public charges by the tax of the 200th denier, the first birth of the greater part of modern economical institutions.

The war against Sweden was sustained in concert with Poland and Denmark. It gave occasion, in 1659, to a brilliant expedition against Nyborg, which did the greatest honour to De Ruyter, at the head of the Dutch squadron, and was a prelude to his glorious destiny. This expedition procured for the Danes the retaking of the island of Fünen.² Peace was concluded in 1660, after the death of King Charles Gustavus—caused, according to one historian, by surprise and grief resulting from the taking of Nyborg.³

The issue of the war with Portugal was less favourable. The cause of this war was the contested possession of the captainship of the north, which the Portuguese had joined to their possessions in the Brazils, and which was claimed by the Dutch.⁴ Hostilities between these two countries seem to have been confined to a maritime field, and were ended by a treaty signed in 1661. The litigated territory was definitively ceded to Portugal, in consideration of an indemnity of four millions of crusadoes, calculated at the value

French translation, p 312, *et seq.*, and in Van der Hoeven, i., p. 25, the annual saving ought to have been twenty-eight millions by the reduction of interest from 5 to 4 per cent. In any event, it is difficult to explain how, even by the application of the sum of twenty-eight millions a year, the debt could have been reduced, from a hundred and forty millions in 1655, to sixty-five millions in 1672, unless it be admitted that there were other sums applied to the redemption besides the revenues saved in the conversion, as may be inferred from what is said by Simons, i. p. 150.

[M. De Parien has, in this Note, accidentally mistaken the principal, or capital sum of the Dutch debt, for the interest thereon. Assuming the principal at a hundred and forty millions of florins, it is obvious that the annual saving, from the reduction of 1 per cent. in the interest, was 1,400,000 florins; and more than double this annual sum would, as M. De Parien suggests, have been requisite to reduce the debt by seventy-five millions in about 16 years. Consult p. 314 of the 3rd (Ratisbon) Edition, of 1709, of the so-called *Memoirs of John De Witt*, where the calculation is that a hundred and forty millions of capital stock would be entirely redeemed, in a period of 41 years, by employment of the reduction of 1 per cent. in the rate of interest as an annual sinking-fund. This calculation is quite correct at 4 per cent.—*F. H.*]

¹ Simons: *Johan De Witt en Zijn Tijd, Derde Deel*, p. 100; Amsterdam, 1842.

² Van der Hoeven, i. p. 122.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104. It is observable, that, in the conferences preceding the declaration of war with Portugal by the States-General, in 1657, the Dutch envoys made use of the Latin language.

of two Dutch florins each. Portugal had also to restore the artillery taken at the Reef¹ and in other Brazilian forts.

The treaty contains, besides, various commercial and customs' regulations.

Another part of the labours of John De Witt relates to the internal business of certain towns or of certain states of the Confederation. Thus we see him at one time bringing to an agreement the regents of the town of Gorcum; at another time, interposing, in the name of the States-General,² between the count and the States of East Friesland, in 1662.³

This peaceful interval left subsisting, without serious modification, the relations between the prince of Orange and the republican party, such as we have seen them, characterised by an admixture of defiance and respect.

These two feelings doubtless inspired the intervention of the States of Holland in the education of the young prince of Orange. In 1660, the States nominated, in fact, six tutors for the youthful prince, who had hitherto been placed under the direction of a teacher named Triglandus. Of the number of these was the pensionary-councillor, and four who had been proposed by the princess Mary, mother of the young William.⁴ Every day the prince received lessons in history and politics from Bornius, and those of another master in mathematical science. John De Witt went every Monday, according to Aitzema, to watch the young William's instruction, and to speak to him of affairs of state. Republicans were thus bringing up, with a more or less sincere interest, the prince for whom the re-established stadtholdership was but to be the stepping-stool to a throne.

In 1663, the States of Holland were, however, offended at seeing introduced into certain churches of their province, a custom, borrowed from the other provinces, of praying publicly for the prince of Orange. Thereupon they enjoined upon all the clergy to

¹ The Reef capitulated in 1654. The war between England and Holland had prevented the United Provinces from succouring their colony, as had been requested of them through the deputation sent to Europe, in 1652, by the Dutch governor of Pernambuco (see Beauchamp: *History of the Brazils* iii., p. 291, *et seq.*). De Witt has been wrongfully reproached upon the subject of this taking of the Reef.

² Van der Hoeven, i., p. 148.

³ *Ibid.* i. p. 184. Thus similarly, we find, at a later period, John De Witt smoothing differences in Overijssel (*ibid.* ii., p. 233).

⁴ See, respecting all this, Van der Hoeven, pp. 87 and 143 to 146, and the German translation of the work of Simons, p. 129, vol. i. Walter Harris, in his *History of William III.*, nevertheless accuses De Witt of having neglected the prince's education (p. 3). Burnet, on his side, says that the prince had learnt neither history nor military art (i., p. 580). After the death of the princess Mary, young William, still aged under 11 years, happily found an enlightened protectress in the person of his maternal grandmother, Amelia de Solms.

pray, in the first place, "for their noble and great powers the States of Holland and West Friesland, as the true sovereign and only sovereign power, after God, in this province; then for the States of the other provinces, their allies, and for all the deputies of the assembly of the States-General, and at the council of State." Soon, however, the attention of Dutch statesmen was to be called in the direction of graver preoccupations.

The United Provinces, at the epoch with which we are occupied, had only Spain for its solid and sincere ally, and had equally to mistrust England and France. The policy of the latter power leaned towards the conquest of the Spanish Netherlands, which were the bulwark of the United Provinces. On another side, England was the maritime and commercial rival of the United Provinces, and sought to assimilate them to her, and, in some respect, to *vassalize* them. The republic of England had sought to incorporate in itself the Netherlandish republic. The royalty of the Stuarts, in its turn, wished to drag the United Provinces into its orbit, through the bond of the stadtholdership.

The whole diplomacy of the United Provinces tended to a division of these dangerous neighbours, and the statesmen of Holland might well tremble with prophetic fear, when they saw Cromwell and Louis XIV. reunited against Spain, and, shortly after, Dunkirk retaken by the armies of this coalition (1658).

Nevertheless, when the treaty of Westminster had satisfied the exigencies of the protector, by the Act of Exclusion which was connected with it, Holland might have believed that the rivalry of national interests was about to be paralysed through certain political sympathies between the two republics.

Its confidence was brief; and when Charles II. was restored to the throne, in 1660, the government of the Hague had to fear simultaneously the political grudges attaching to some circumstances of the pretender's exile,¹ the influence of the parentage of the prince of Orange, and the commercial hostility of the two people.² Charles II. did not hesitate to show, in various circumstances, his ill will against what he called the *faction of Louwenstein*, nor to complain of the conduct of John De Witt towards his nephew.³

¹ M. Simons (1st part, p. 231, of the German translation) advances that Charles II. retained resentment on the subject of the clause of the treaty of Westminster, which denied to the republic the right of receiving any English rebel on her territory. Hume adds, that Charles II. had as much aversion from the Dutch character as taste for the French character (ch. lxix).

² Van der Hoeven relates different attacks directed by the English against Dutch commerce in 1664 (ii., p. 224).

³ Kerroux, pp. 706, 727, 783.

The defensive alliance, concluded on the 27th April, 1662, between the United Provinces and France, showed on which side were, not the confidence and friendship of the Dutch, but their least fears. Notwithstanding the efforts of the United Provinces to appease the rupture, Charles II. declared war against them on the 4th March, 1665.¹

In this formidable struggle, in which the British hostility was supported by an attack of the bishop of Munster, France remained inactive down to the moment when she might fear lest war should produce, in the Low Countries, a reaction favourable to Orangeism. Then Louis XIV. decided to send help to the States-General, and he even declared war against England, without, however, ever joining his fleets with those of the Seven Provinces, which thus had to support almost alone the weight of the struggle.²

Van Opdam, Cornelius Tromp, Cornelius de Witt, and particularly De Ruyter, disputed the empire of the sea with the English flag. John De Witt himself was distinguished, not only for his administrative services, but further, for his nautical skill, and guided the exit of a squadron through a difficult passage. The invention of the chained balls used in the course of this war has even been attributed to him.³ This struggle of three years does so much honour to the government of John De Witt, that we may properly recall its principal turns of fortune.

The opening of the naval war was unfortunate for the Dutch. Met by the English fleet on the 13th May, 1665, at ten leagues from the coast of Suffolk, the fleet of the United Provinces sustained a sad defeat. The ship of admiral Wassenaar Van Opdam was blown into the air. The lieutenant-admiral of the "Meuse," Kortenaar, was also killed in the fight, and several Dutch captains did their duty so badly as to deserve severe punishment; whilst the glorious death of Kortenaar and of Wassenaar Van Opdam was recompensed by two of those marble mausoleums, which revive, in the silence of the temple and to the eyes of the traveller in Holland, the renown of the ancient navy of the country.

The United Provinces made the most generous efforts to repair this disaster; and on the 14th August of the same year, they again

¹ Hume relates that Charles II. was suspected of having declared war against the Dutch to divert a part of the subsidies conceded on account of the hostilities. He adds, that the taste of Charles II. for marine affairs might have contributed to his determination.

² It is right to observe, that the necessity for showing front to the formidable approaches of the French fleet did sometimes weaken the English squadrons.

³ Van der Hoeven, i., p. 251. John De Witt renewed a nautical exploit analogous to that which we have just referred to, in 1672 (*ibid.*, p. 279). See also the German translation of Simons, part ii., p. 173.

put to sea a naval force, composed, without counting fire-ships and yachts, of 92 vessels, carrying 4,337 cannon, 15,000 sailors, 1,283 marine soldiers (marines), and 3,501 soldiers of the land force. The fleet was placed under the command of De Ruyter, directed by three representatives of the States, Huyghens, Boreel, and the grand pensionary himself, who, on this occasion as on several others, was replaced in his office by his nephew Vivien, pensionary of Dordrecht. It was, in fact, then the custom in Holland, as in the middle ages at Venice, and, later still, under the French republic in the last century, for military commanders to be assisted and watched in their operations by delegates from the civil power to which they owed obedience.

The Dutch fleet sought in vain, until the month of October, for the British squadrons, without finding an opportunity of fighting them.

It was otherwise in the year following. De Ruyter, whom De Witt had helped in getting ready the armament without following him this time to sea, gave furious battle, on the 11th and 12th June, in the Downs, to the English fleet commanded by Monk, now duke of Albemarle, and compelled it to retreat towards the Thames; but the English having received reinforcements on the 13th June, the battle began again the next day. After a last and warm encounter, in which De Ruyter and Tromp fought like heroes, the English squadron of the white set sail northward, while the admirals of the red and blue took refuge towards the coast of England. The fog interrupted the pursuit of the Dutch, who returned gloriously to Wielingues, with a loss of only four vessels, whilst the English had twenty-three to deplore. The English admiral, Ayscough, taken prisoner, was made a sight of to the people of the Hague. We have two bulletins of this long battle. The letter of Monk to Sir W. Coventry is brief. The duke of Albemarle writes, that he had never fought with worse officers, and that there were not more than twenty out of their number who had behaved themselves like men.¹ John De Witt has on the other hand left us, in an official report, the detailed recital of this brilliant victory of the Dutch,² which was, unhappily,³ compensated shortly afterwards by a reverse (on the 14th August), in the sequel of which Tromp, disagreeing with De Ruyter, had to give way to the superiority of him who had become his chief after

¹ See the letter, wrongly dated, in Pepys i., p. 110, of the 8vo. edition.

² Van der Hoeven, pp. 25 to 37.

³ Happily, from an English point of view.—*F. H.*

having been the pupil of his illustrious father,¹ and was replaced by Van Ghent.

The year 1667 saw accomplished, under the direction of Cornelius de Witt as deputy of the States, and of the admirals De Ruyter and Van Ghent, a maritime expedition of the most daring kind. A powerful Netherlandish fleet, carrying some boarding troops, directed itself in the early part of June towards the mouth of the Thames, took possession of the fort of Sheerness, in course of building on the Isle of Sheppey, and went as far as Chatham up the Medway, a river which runs into the Thames on the right of its mouth. Several vessels sunk in the river by the English, and their firing from the castle of Upnor, did not prevent the Dutch from taking or burning nine large English vessels, amongst which was the "Royal Charles," that had brought back to England the restored sovereign, whose name it bore. The States-General were very proud of the success of the Chatham expedition. Richly chased golden cups, around which the taking of Sheerness and of the English ships was represented in enamel, were given to Cornelius De Witt and admiral De Ruyter. The latter received, in addition, a stock-coupon representing a capital of six thousand florins, and lesser sums were allotted to the chief officers who had lent him their assistance.² The success of the Chatham expedition spread fear into London, and hastened a conclusion of the negotiations for peace, which were shortly afterwards signed at Bréda.

This war period appears to have produced a double and opposite effect upon the political situation at home. On one side was seen Orangeism oft awakening in the recollections of the Dutch people, uneasy at one reverse or another; and, contrariwise, the defiance of the opposition party increasing in like proportion. In 1666, the States of Holland, under the influence of this feeling, changed two of the tutors entrusted with the prince's education, and made fresh appointments of the persons of his household and of the gentlemen of his chamber.³

Nevertheless, as the prince advanced in years, so grew in the eyes of far-sighted men the prognostics of his influence. The star of his future was perceived by many; and, in 1666, a member of the States-General was able to exclaim, with penetrating raillery:

¹ Martin Tromp, killed in 1653 in the war against Cromwell.

² Holland was parsimonious to her servants, and John De Witt, whose allowance at the outset was 3,000 florins, did not receive at the epoch of his greatest power more than 7,000 florins a year as pensionary-councillor.—See the work of Simons, part iii., c. 2.

³ Van der Hoeven, ii., pp. 17 and 18.

“Holland thinks to make of the prince a child of the State, but I see that in a little while she herself will be a child of the prince.”¹ On board the very fleet of the States, Orangeism, professed by Cornelius Tromp, had burst out with demonstrations in the midst of a war conducted with skill and courage by the opposite party.²

There is often a culminating point in a man's fortune, beyond which decline begins. The epoch which followed the conclusion of the peace with England at Bréda, on the 13th July, 1667, represents this fact in the political fate of the brothers De Witt. It was at the close of 1667 that the perpetual edict abolishing the stadtholdership was voted and sworn to by all functionaries, with, it is said, a single exception.³ In 1668 was signed the triple alliance, concluded between the United Provinces, England, and Sweden, with the view of protecting the United Provinces against the threatening ambition of Louis XIV. The preceding two acts represent the triumph of the mind of John De Witt within and without his country; but they also mark the diverging point of a reaction, whose ultimate end is the torment inflicted upon the two brothers by popular passion.

The perpetual edict of 5th August, 1667, attributed by some historians to the fear with which the States of Holland were inspired by the plots contrived to support the English arms,⁴ was a factitious success, exceeding the true strength which belonged to the party that obtained it, and the true state of public opinion in the United Provinces.

All history affords a certain number of these circumstances, in which a political party, profiting by its ascendant, gains an ephemeral triumph, which the natural working of events and the order of things destroy. We have noticed the powerful roots of Orangeism when it was only represented by an infant;—how much more confident and proud should the party have been when the young William was approaching his majority, and beginning to show to all eyes the wisdom of his mind and the firmness of his character!

This was the moment when the party of the brothers De Witt, making a bad use of the scope of its own power, endeavoured to close the future of the young prince. His banishment alone, if it had been possible, would have been suited to ensure such a result, and instead of that, three years after the perpetual edict, the son and heir of the stadtholder was voluntarily called to the Council of

¹ Van der Hoeven.

² *Ibid* i., pp 243—250.

³ *Ibid.* ii, p. 197.

⁴ Raynal: *Histoire du Stadthouderat*, edition of 1750, i., p. 221.

State, through the sole fact of the influence of his name and position.

The triple alliance, the idea of which was doubtless easier of justification in the face of the growing progress of Louis XIV.'s ambition, was not, in reality, less insignificant nor less dangerous. All political tackings-about have in general their dangers. The maritime rivalry between the English and Dutch nations, the ties of the prince of Orange to Charles II., and the opposition of the monarchal spirit, restored in England, to the republican spirit of the government of John De Witt,¹ were, besides, evident and special dangers to the triple alliance.

The wish of Charles II. to destroy in his country, with the help of Louis XIV., Protestantism and public liberty, gave the mortal blow to this combination. With the aid of some seductions, Louis XIV. easily succeeded in withdrawing the English government from the triple alliance; and from that moment, the United Provinces, betrayed by Sweden, and reduced to the support of Spain and Brandenburg,² were exposed to the ambition and resentment of Louis XIV. Did John De Witt (who was in the wrong in not foreseeing the danger far off enough, and in allowing the territorial military condition of his country³ to become disorganized) do, administratively and militarily, all that was suited to allay the danger, and was he only paralysed in his efforts by the stadtholder's party, as writes the Abbé Raynal?⁴ I am inclined to think so,⁵ notwithstanding some reproaches which have been directed against him in this respect. But it is evident that, with restricted military resources, with germs of treasons at home, which burst forth soon after,⁶ and finally, with the enormous preponderance of Louis XIV.'s forces, the most far-sighted efforts would soon have proved almost completely useless.

The whole policy of the anti-stadtholdership government had rested upon the division between France and England. The alliance of these two States struck it a fatal blow; and the political retirement of the pensionary would scarcely have sufficed to cut

¹ The Court of England had been much annoyed by certain writings and medals disseminated in Holland.—Van der Hoeven, *ii.*, pp. 243, 244.

² Frederick William, the *great elector*, true founder of that which has since become the kingdom of Prussia, possessed at this period Brandenburg, the Duchy of Prussia, Eastern Pomerania, the Archbishoprics and secularized Bishoprics of Magdeburg, Halberstadt, Minden, and Camin. He bordered upon the Netherlands, through the possession of Cleves and Berg.

³ Davies, *iii.*, pp. 79 and 91.

⁴ *I.*, p. 245.

⁵ *See*, in this point of view, Van der Hoeven, pp. 247, 258, 264, 298.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 240 and 261.

asunder this coalition of two great external powers, supported by the discontent of a great party at home.

John De Witt, *simultaneously*, according to Voltaire,¹ *quite a republican, and jealous of his own particular authority*, understood it only imperfectly; and the measure which, at the beginning of 1672, declared the prince of Orange captain and admiral-general, was too tardy for the people and too restricted to regain for De Witt the mind of the prince.² The invasion of Holland by the armies of Louis XIV. was inevitable. Discouragement and treason accelerated its progress; but the Dutch fleet did honour to the imminent disaster of the country, by the memorable battle of Solesbay, fought 7th June, 1672, and in which De Ruyter coped with the two admirals of France and England. Cornelius De Witt, deputy of the States on board the fleet, saw several of his guards fall at his feet under the enemy's fire. His companion in the Medway expedition, Van Ghent, wounded in the fight, died in it, to use the Dutch expression, *on the bed of honour*.

There might have been anticipated for the armies of France, upon the territory of the United Provinces, a triumph greater than it failed to be through want of skill in the direction of their operations. But that which constitutes a striking political phenomenon, is the violence of the reaction produced by the French invasion in the home government of Holland and of the United Provinces. It was not enough for the people to have seen the two brothers De Witt deprived in a few days of their influence and of their power. He who had been so recently honoured at Chatham and Solesbay, was accused before the court of Holland of having contrived a plot against the life of the prince of Orange. After undergoing the torture of the rack, supported with a courage which has become historic,³ Cornelius De Witt was condemned to banishment by a sentence which defined no crime.⁴

Brought near to the noble prisoner by a brotherly visit, John De Witt found himself hemmed in with him by the riot. The two brothers were massacred at the Hague, on the 20th August, 1672, near to the Gevangenpoort, not by a few individuals of a populace gone astray, but with the assistance of the burghers,

¹ *Siècle de Louis XIV.* i., p. 396, Ed. of 1830.

² See the 13th chapter of the 3rd part of Simons's work.

³ It is asserted that he recited to his judges, in the midst of the most cruel agonies, these verses of Horace—

“Justum ac tenacem propositi virum,
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
Non vultus instantis tyranni
Mente quatit solida.”

⁴ Kerroux, p. 819.

armed to keep order, and as victims of a kind of political execution. Their remains, mutilated with an atrocity which almost makes humanity blush, scarcely found an obscure resting-place, but lately discovered ;¹ and, as if everything in this sad drama was destined to bear a character which the generosity of our century can no longer understand, one of their murderers was rewarded.²

Their disaster confounds itself with the progress of the fortune of him whose greatness they had sought to stay, and who was about to owe each of his successes to the faults of Louis XIV.

Elevated to the stadtholdership by the counter-stroke of the aggression of the great king against Holland, aided in his conquest of the throne of England by the hatred of French influence visited upon James II., fortified in his army by the Protestant refugees whom the revocation of the Edict of Nantes had driven from France,³ William III. closed in his kingdom the era of political revolutions, and, according to a memorable appreciation, "*a assuré la religion, la gloire, et les libertés de l'Angleterre.*"⁴

The corpses of the brothers De Witt were thrown, by the fury of a humiliated and uneasy people, at the feet of that brilliant destiny which had no need of so odious a sacrifice. Equitable history has, so to speak, drawn them from the tomb in which they were thrust with their policy, by attenuating their faults, through the exaltation of their intentions, of their talents, and of their courage.

Those who, in the course of time, have changed the foundations of their country's governments, attract the attention of the world by qualities needful for these great political transformations. Without being upon an equal level with those powerful instruments of Providence, in whom are personified the great revolutions to which I allude, John De Witt was enabled to maintain in a semi-monarchical country a kind of republican regency, long uncertain perhaps of its definitive tendency, but which scarcely ceased to be glorious until the day when it ceased to exist.

In a country limited in extent, but powerful withal, De Witt exhibited something of the virtuous career of a Washington. But he did not, like the latter, attain the honour of representing

¹ They were transferred, in the night of the 21st to 22nd August, into the vault which John De Witt possessed in the new church at the Hague (Kerroux, p. 837). M. Veegens has published, upon this point, a letter, in which he advances that the tomb is marked by the number 77 in the church referred to (*Jets over het graf der de Wittten. Uit eenen brief aan M. J. Heemskerck*).

² Kerroux, p. 841.

³ Upon the history of the French refugees, see the *Moniteur Universel* of the 2nd and 3rd November, and 3rd December, 1851.

⁴ Expressions of the Emperor Napoleon III., i., p. 243 of his *Œuvres*.

the stable and enlightened aspiration of his country; therefore he fell beneath the blows of an adverse party: and, notwithstanding the value of his services, the defender of Dutch liberty found, amongst his own, more murderers than republican passion has ever, perhaps, armed against any master.

History ought not to search too systematically amongst human destinies for the precise retribution of its heroes' merits.

Contemporary with De Witt, the fanatic Cromwell came to his end, in the midst of prosperity. We may say of him, like of Sylla, that he died

—“Tranquille,
Comme un bon citoyen dans le sein de sa ville;

and his inanimate ashes were alone the object of the vengeance of that power which he had violently dethroned.

De Witt, after having co-operated in the education of William III., and after having disputed the future only of his policy, perished like a malefactor, given up to popular frenzies affecting a shadow of justice. Posterity, which sometimes rectifies the decrees of fortune,¹ has shown itself equitable by reinstating his memory and glorifying his virtues; but, under any circumstances, the saintly glory shed by misfortune around the name of this upright and able minister, ought not to blind the judgment of history to his errors.

The work of John De Witt was a struggle against the impossible; and, as it were, the expression of two great misconceptions in the line of diplomacy and politics. De Witt was unable, after the Act of Exclusion and the Perpetual Edict, to recover the sympathy of the uncle of the prince of Orange. He flattered himself, it is said, but in vain, to regain it by concessions trafficked for the prince's advantage, but forgot too much, as Burnet observes, the catholic and absolutist sentiments of Charles II. The moment he separated himself from France, whose ambition he with reason feared, and whom he had so cautiously treated sometimes, as to appear to certain writers of his own country to have been blinded by her,² his fall was inevitable. But that which above all brought on this reverse was a presumptuous idea, which deceived De Witt, respecting his true mission in the home affairs of his country.

¹ Fox has said of him, “The most truly patriotic minister that ever appeared on the public stage;” and Raynal, perhaps a little exaggerating in his appreciation of Cornelius De Witt, calls him *the greatest man of the republic, after his brother*. Did not this eulogy belong more appropriately to the illustrious friend of John De Witt, Michael De Ruyter?

² See the little work published at the Hague, in 1757, under the following title: *Het Karakter Van den Raad pensonaris Jean de Witt, en zyne factie beschreeven door den Graf d'Estrades, &c.*

Instead of preparing for the advent of the future stadtholder, in the midst of a government benevolent towards the House of Orange, conciliatory and firm, he wished to suppress the stadtholdership and to establish a sort of republican oligarchy in Holland.

De Witt represents, perhaps, in his country—saving the difference of the times, characters and circumstances—that aristocracy which has not known, in scarcely any part of modern continental Europe, how to establish its true position betwixt the dynasties and the people. More excusable, doubtless, than those French gentlemen who dreamed a republic in the sixteenth century, he appears to have misconstrued the difficulties presented in the basing of a government upon the foundation of the isolated aristocratic principle. It was not given to him to read in the decline of Venice, which had already begun in his time, the signal of the future fall of this oligarchical republic.

De Witt knew neither to ally himself with the prince of Orange nor to interest the democracy in his cause.¹ These two elements entered into a coalition against him, or at least the second became the instrument of Orangeism to his ruin. Burnet has besides reproached him with not having sufficiently upheld the authority of the Council of State, and with having too much left the executive power in the assembly of the States, as also with having too much lessened the authority of the judicial courts at the Hague for the advantage of the local jurisdictions.² The preceding are secondary faults, which, well or ill proved, have in any event rather facilitated than occasioned the decay of his power.

The political error of John De Witt led him sometimes to means which were somewhat deficient in straightforwardness. Admitting that the part he played in the Act of Exclusion is completely cleared up,³ his tactics respecting the young William were often a trick upon public feeling.⁴ His conduct, too, towards De Buat and Van der Graaf⁵—just, strictly speaking—may, never-

¹ The author of the *Encyclopédie Méthodique* reproaches John De Witt in this last respect (*V^o Provinces Unies*).

² Vol. i., p. 584.

³ The only positive testimony against De Witt, quoted with that view by Kerroux, p. 704, is that of D'Estrades, who is convicted of error upon certain facts, such, for instance, as upon the part of ambassador, which he attributes to De Witt, at the time of the treaty.

⁴ Kerroux, p. 132.

⁵ De Buat left at De Witt's house, through carelessness, a letter which contained the sketch of a plot in favour of the prince of Orange. He was condemned to death and executed, the 2nd October, 1666. Van der Graaf, more culpable, was of the number of those who conspired against the person of the pensionary two months before the massacre of the 20th August, 1672. "He died," it is related, "with great sentiments of piety and repentance, and was looked upon by the friends of the House of Orange as a martyr to the interests of that House" (Kerroux, p. 797).

theless, have presented to angry assemblages the aspect of flagrant severity!

Under every circumstance, the passions before which he fell ought to have been disarmed, on account of his personal character. Eminent for his probity in a centre of corruption, where the ambassador of France could only pick out, besides the brothers De Witt, two incorruptible public men, he was also full of patriotism and activity. The hatreds which reached him were then in a great measure the result of the passions of his enemies, of the violence of the times, and also of the restraint experienced by a country upon which the development of the monarchical form was almost forced by its antecedents and by the requirements of its external policy, and which found in that governmental form a pledge of confidence and of security.

“If this virtuous and zealous citizen,” says Condillac of him,¹ “had succeeded in ruining the hopes of the young William III., and had proscribed the stadtholdership for ever, we cannot disguise from ourselves that the United Provinces, far indeed from being able to find within themselves the resources necessary for repelling the blows with which they were threatened, would have been led to inevitable loss by the vices of their government and of their constitution.”

If it were permitted to me to seek for the cause of the faults of the celebrated and unfortunate pensionary, in these personal and intimate circumstances, difficult to establish at this distance of time, but which are of so high a degree of importance to the historian, I would venture, perhaps, to say that these faults resulted—first, from the birth of John De Witt in the bosom of a party and of a family exacerbated by the acts of the Orange policy; and also, secondly, from too absolute a line of conduct, be it the result of the influence of the party, or else of the nature itself of the pensionary’s own mind.

De Witt was a mathematician and geometrician. The development of his education and of his thoughts in this direction² explains at one and the same time his financial and his nautical aptitude, and probably also, to a certain degree, the somewhat obstinate tendencies of a literary and learned mind, but which certain ill-explained testimonies and difficult, at least, to admit entirely,

¹ *Cours d'Études* vi., p. 198.

² John De Witt is the author of a little geometrical work, printed under the title of *Elementa Linearum Curvarum*, published for the first time, according to Van der Hoeven, by Francis Van Schooten, Professor of Mathematics at the University of Leyden, at Louis and Daniel Elzevir’s, Amsterdam, 1659.—Van der Hoeven, i., p. 14.

pretend to have been defective in sufficient historic and diplomatic instruction.¹

De Witt was, moreover, a perspicuous economist, an anticipator, in several respects, of the views of modern science; and he appears to have understood the advantages of freedom in trade and industry.² He passes for having been the joint author of a work translated into French under his name,³ and in which, besides an apology for the republican policy and a criticism upon the policy of the stadtholdership, viewed as stained with dynastic egotism and warlike passion, some curious details are found upon the commerce and finances of Holland, and a just foresight of the danger of the enormous taxation to the prosperity of that country.⁴

De Witt extended his preoccupations to various branches of public credit, and was the author of a fortunate conversion of perpetual annuities; he had also fathomed the operations of Life Annuities, then much resorted to in Holland. The treatise of John De Witt upon the "Value of life annuities compared with that of perpetual annuities," has for its object, to establish, by the observations of experience and the calculus of probabilities, that the State, assuring perpetual annuities at 25 years' purchase, ought collaterally to assure life annuities to nominees of a young age, at 16 years' purchase; and that it had sustained a loss in granting them, at different periods, at 6 years' purchase, at 7 years' purchase, at 8 years' purchase, at 11 or 12 years' purchase, and even again at 14 years' purchase, according to the scale adopted at the time of the composition of this work.

The memoir of John De Witt, recently discovered by Mr. Hendriks, Actuary, and Fellow of the Statistical Society, of London, has

¹ I only quote with hesitation, in default of authorities being indicated, the following passage from an historical dictionary, composed by a society of men of letters, where it is said, upon the subject of De Witt:—"Not acquainted, in any way, with modern history or with the state of foreign Courts, he committed the most gross faults upon matters of ceremony."

We are assured that there exists at the library of Leyden a collection of letters of John De Witt, bearing witness to a large acquaintance with French and Dutch literature.

² The *Encyclopédie Méthodique*, article *Finances*, under the word *Maîtrise*, quotes the following passage, attributed to John De Witt:—"It is a hurtful and very useless thing to limit manufactures by guilds or trade-bodies, directors or provosts, or to order in any way in what manner the manufactures which are trafficked with foreign countries are to be made."

³ The body of this work, published in 1670, in Dutch, under the title of *Anvysing der politike gronden en maximen der Republike van Holland en West Friesland* (Explanation of the bases and political maxims of the Republic of Holland and West Friesland), and translated into French under the title of *Mémoires de Jean De Witt*, is attributed to P. de Lacourt.

⁴ See chapter xii. of the *Mémoires de Jean De Witt*, translated from the original into French; the Hague, 1709. The chapter is entitled—"That the too great taxes will at length drive away all prosperity from Holland."

been translated by him into English in his *Contributions to the History of Insurance*.¹ This memoir, distributed by the pensionary to the States of Holland, in 1671, appears to have been suppressed, as inopportune, shortly after its composition; and for the motive that the States-General were soon obliged, under the blow of the dangers of the year 1672, to offer life annuities at 10 years' purchase, on account of the tightness of public credit.²

"Let us concede," says Mr. Hendriks on the subject of this work, the disappearance of which had long been regretted, "that the then novel and ingenious views, and the many germs of truth, contained in De Wit's treatise and other labours on the subject of life annuities, did honour to his discrimination as a mathematician, and to his judgment as a statesman; and that he may be considered as the first who perceived that a new-found science, which was but beginning to attract the attention of philosophers of his day, could be applied, not solely to the investigation of the hazards of players at ignoble games of cards and dice, but also to the business of life and to the good of the commonwealth!"

The preceding lines ought to form a part of the intellectual portrait of a statesman whose political life has fixed our attention, and even tempted our pen, without inspiring us, nevertheless, as the reader will have perceived, with the ambition of becoming his real historian.³

¹ London, 1851; printed by Laytons, 150, Fleet Street. It is inserted in pages 40 to 57. (The reference is to the privately-printed copy of Mr. Hendriks's paper.)

² *Vide* the second fragment of the *Contributions to the History of Insurance*, p. 28. (Third fragment in *Assurance Magazine*, vol. iii., p. 120.)

³ M. Ant. Lefèvre Pontalis, auditor of the Council of State, is occupied with extensive researches upon John De Witt. There may be expected from them interesting light on this remarkable period of a history which has not yet been treated upon in the French literature of our century. M. Combes, inspector of the Academy, recently charged with a mission, from the Minister of Public Instruction, to Holland, has also gleaned there information upon the epoch of John De Witt, and various curious letters of the councillor-pensionary written in the French language.

[Amongst other Frenchmen of eminence who interest themselves on the subject of De Witt may be noticed M. Guizot, who was present at the reading of M. de Parieu's paper before the Academy of France, and who is connected by marriage with the De Witt family. One of his daughters is married to M. Conrad De Witt, and the other to M. Cornelius De Witt, and we have the best authority for mentioning that their families were residing last autumn with the illustrious ex-statesman at Val Richer.—*F. H.*]

[Following M. de Parieu's example, the name of De Witt has, throughout this paper, been spelt with two *t*'s. It will, perhaps, be recollected, that in the papers for which Mr. Hendriks is responsible, the name was spelt with only *one t*. The latter orthography of the name was adopted, not on light grounds, but upon collation of such contemporaneous evidence, documentary, medallic and typographical, as was at hand. The conclusion arrived at was, that De Witt used to spell his name in more ways than one—like Buonaparte and numberless others.

The following questions were based upon this evidence, and inserted, by Mr. Hendriks, in *Notes and Queries*, 2nd February, 1856:—

Travellers may see at the Museum of Amsterdam his physical image, painted by De Baan. The face of the pensionary is intellectual and grave. One might find some remote likeness (if my impressions, deprived of an immediate point of comparison, be correct) to the features of Fénelon.

Holland, great in its influence on former times and small in its territory, has been endowed with a genius less severe, less grand and less absolute—but more practical, more natural, and more varied—than that of Venice; she has had, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a specimen, so to speak, of all glories. What Huyghens was for her in science, Rembrandt and so many others in painting, Spinosa in philosophy, De Ruyter, the two Tromps and Cohorn in the art of war, Grotius in jurisprudence, Boërhaave in medicine, that John De Witt and William III. have also been (the former so unlucky, the latter so fortunate), and by different claims, in the lofty career of politics, which rests, perhaps, upon the most elevated and most difficult of human sciences, as it does upon the noblest and the most sensitive of arts.

- “1. Did the grand-pensionary, in his Latin correspondence with learned foreigners, or in signing diplomas and instructions in Latin, spell his name, habitually with one *t*?
- “2. Did the grand-pensionary sign letters and state documents, in Dutch, habitually with two *t*'s?
- “3. Was there a period when the grand-pensionary changed his ways of spelling his signature?
- “4. If queries 1 to 3 remain unsolved, are we not, nevertheless, justified in assuming that the facts above adverted to (viz., the evidence detailed) are sufficient to leave it open to us to spell the name either with one *t* or else with two *t*'s; and to be equally free from the possible discomfort of the criticism of etymologists, or from the charge of abetting the ambiguity with which the ‘printer's devils’ of all countries treat the name of De Wit?”

These queries do not seem to have yet been answered; but, since their appearance, a very acute correspondent of *Notes and Queries*, writing under the initials H. B. C., altered (we assume, of course, the correctness of the printing) his way of spelling the name, from De Wit to De Wit. This alteration occurs in the course of the articles in which H. B. C. so fairly explains the barbarous conduct of William III. towards the De Wits, a conduct which is as great a blot upon his memory as is the massacre of Glencoe.

We are aware that some readers will say that the subject of this particular note is of no great importance. But we may reasonably differ from such a view, even on general grounds, in England at the present time (June, 1859), when the question whether the spelling of Bordeaux with two *u*'s, or of Hofer with two *f*'s, be excusable or not, has just been a bone of contention between the supporters of the Civil Service Examination Commissioners, on the one side, and of Lord Malmesbury, *ex parte* the diplomatic service, on the other.—*F. H.*]