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Lyttelton, George <Lord>

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XVIII. William The Third, King of England - John De Witt, Pensioner of
Holland.

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with all the praise you obtained from the learned men whom you patronized, or the great men whom you courted.



DIALOGUE XVIII.

WILLIAM THE THIRD, King of England.—JOHN DE WITT,
Pensionary of Holland.

WILLIAM.

THOUGH I had no cause to love you, yet, believe me, I sincerely lament your fate. Who could have thought that De Witt, the most popular minister that ever served a commonwealth, should fall a sacrifice to popular fury! Such admirable talents, such virtues, as you were endowed with, so clear, so cool, so comprehensive a head, a heart so untainted with any kind of vice, despising money, despising pleasure, despising the vain ostentation of greatness, such application to business, such ability in it, such courage, such firmness, and so perfect a knowledge of the nation you governed, seemed to assure you of a fixed and stable support in the public affection. But nothing can be durable that depends on the passions of the people.

DE WITT.

It is very generous in your majesty, not only to compassionate the fate of a man, whose political principles made him an enemy to your greatness, but ascribe it to the caprice and inconstancy of the people; as if there had been nothing very blameable in his conduct. I feel the magnanimity of this discourse from your majesty, and it confirms what I have heard of all your behaviour after my death. But I must frankly confess, that, although the rage of the populace was carried much too far, when they tore me and my unfortunate brother to pieces, yet I certainly had deserved to lose their affection, by relying too much on the uncertain and dangerous friendship
of

of France, and by weakening the military strength of the state, to serve little purposes of my own power, and secure to myself the interested affection of the burgomasters, or others, who had credit and weight in the faction, the favour of which I courted. This had almost subjected my country to France, if you, great prince, had not been set at the head of the falling republic, and had not exerted such extraordinary virtues and abilities, to raise and support it, as surpassed even the heroism and prudence of William, our first stadtholder, and equalled you to the most illustrious patriots of Greece or Rome.

WILLIAM.

This praise from your mouth is glorious to me indeed! What can so much exalt the character of a prince, as to have his actions approved by a zealous republican, and the enemy of his house!

DE WITT.

If I did not approve them, I should shew myself the enemy of the republic. You never sought to tyrannize over it; you loved, you defended, you preserved its freedom. Thebes was not more indebted to Epaminondas, or Pelopidas, for its independance and glory, than the United Provinces were to you. How wonderful was it to see a youth, who had scarce attained to the twenty-second year of his age, whose spirit had been depressed and kept down by a jealous and hostile faction, rising at once to the conduct of a most arduous and perilous war, stopping an enemy victorious, triumphant, who had penetrated into the heart of his country; driving him back, and recovering from him all he had conquered: to see this done with an army, in which, a little before, there was neither discipline, courage, nor sense of honour! Ancient history has no exploit superior to it; and it will ennoble the modern, whenever a Livy or a Plutarch shall arise, to do justice to it, and set the hero who performed it in a true light.

WILLIAM.

WILLIAM.

Say, rather, when time shall have worn out that malignity and rancour of party, which in free states is so apt to oppose itself to the sentiments of gratitude and esteem for their servants and benefactors.

DEWITT.

See Temple's
Memoirs
from the
year 1672
to 1679, p.
259, 320.
321.

How magnanimous was your reply, how much in the spirit of true *ancient virtue*, when being asked, in the greatest extremity of our danger, "*How you intended to live after Holland was lost?*" You said, "*You would live on the lands you had left in Germany, and had rather pass your life in hunting there, than sell your country or liberty to France at any rate!*" How nobly did you think, when, being offered your patrimonial lordships and lands in the county of Burgundy, or the full value of them from France, by the mediation of England, in the treaty of peace, your answer was, "*That, to gain one good town more for the Spaniards in Flanders, you would be content to lose them all!*" No wonder, after this, that you were able to combine all Europe in a league against the power of France; that you were the center of union, and the directing soul of that wise, that generous confederacy, formed by your labours; that you could steadily support and keep it together, in spite of repeated misfortunes; that even after defeats you were as formidable to Louis, as other generals after victories; and that in the end you became the deliverer of Europe, as you had before been of Holland.

WILLIAM.

I had in truth no other object, no other passion at heart, throughout my whole life, but to maintain the independance and freedom of Europe, against the ambition of France. It was this desire which formed the whole plan of my policy, which animated all my counsels, both as prince of Orange and king of England.

DE

D E W I T T.

This desire was the most noble (I speak it with shame) that could warm the heart of a prince, whose ancestors had opposed, and in a great measure destroyed, the power of Spain, when that nation aspired to the monarchy of Europe. France, sir, in your days, had an equal ambition and more strength to support her vast designs, than Spain under the government of Philip the Second. That ambition you restrained, that strength you resisted. I, alas! was seduced by her perfidious court, and by the necessity of affairs in that system of policy which I had adopted, to ask her assistance, to rely on her favour, and to make the commonwealth, whose counsels I directed, subservient to her greatness.—Permit me, sir, to explain to you the motives of my conduct. If all the princes of Orange had acted like you, I should never have been the enemy of your house. But prince Maurice of Nassau desired to oppress the liberty of that state, which his virtuous father had freed at the expence of his life, and which he himself had defended, against the arms of the house of Austria, with the highest reputation of military abilities. Under a pretence of religion (the most execrable cover of a wicked design) he put to death, as a criminal, that upright minister, Barnevelt, his father's best friend, because he refused to concur with him in treason against the state. He likewise imprisoned several other good men and lovers of their country, confiscated their estates, and ruined their families. Yet, after he had done these cruel acts of injustice, with a view to make himself sovereign of the Dutch commonwealth, he found they had drawn such a general odium upon him, that, not daring to accomplish his iniquitous purpose, he stopped short of the tyranny to which he had sacrificed his honour and virtue: a disappointment so mortifying, and so painful to his mind, that it probably hastened his death.

W I L L I A M.

WILLIAM.

Would to heaven he had died before the meeting of that infamous synod of Dort, by which he not only dishonoured himself and his family, but the Protestant religion itself! Forgive this interruption—my grief forced me to it—I desire you to proceed.

DEWITT.

The brother of Maurice, prince Henry, who succeeded to his dignities in the republic, acted with more moderation. But the son of that good prince, your majesty's father, (I am sorry to speak what I know you hear with pain) resumed, in the pride and fire of his youth, the ambitious designs of his uncle. He failed in his undertaking, and soon afterwards died, but left in the hearts of the whole republican party an incurable jealousy and dread of his family. Full of these prejudices, and zealous for liberty, I thought it my duty, as pensionary of Holland, to prevent for ever, if I could, your restoration to the power your ancestors had enjoyed, which I sincerely believed would be inconsistent with the safety and freedom of my country.

WILLIAM.

Let me stop you a moment here.—When my great-grandfather formed the plan of the Dutch commonwealth, he made the power of a stadtholder one of the principal springs in his system of government. How could you imagine that it would ever go well when deprived of this spring, so necessary to adjust and balance its motions? A constitution originally formed with no mixture of regal power may long be maintained in all its vigour and energy, without such a power; but, if any degree of monarchy was mixed from the beginning in the principles of it, the forcing *that* out must necessarily disorder and weaken the whole fabric. This was particularly the case in our republic. The negative voice of every small town in the provincial states, the tedious slowness of our forms and deliberations,

berations, the facility with which foreign ministers may seduce or purchase the opinions of so many persons as have a right to concur in all our resolutions, make it impossible for the government, even in the quietest times, to be well carried on, without the authority and influence of a stadtholder, which are the only remedy our constitution has provided for those evils.

D E W I T T.

I acknowledge they are.—But I and my party thought no evil so great as that remedy; and therefore we sought for other more pleasing resources. One of these, upon which we most confidently depended, was the friendship of France. I flattered myself that the interest of the French would secure to me their favour; as your relation to the crown of England might naturally raise in them a jealousy of your power. I hoped they would encourage the trade and commerce of the Dutch, in opposition to the English, the ancient enemies of their crown, and let us enjoy all the benefits of a perpetual peace, unless we made war upon England, or England upon us; in either of which cases it was reasonable to presume we should have their assistance. The French minister at the Hague, who served his court but too well, so confirmed me in these notions, that I had no apprehensions of the *mine* which was forming under my feet.

W I L L I A M.

You found your authority strengthened by a plan so agreeable to your party; and this contributed more to deceive your sagacity than all the art of D'Estrades.

D E W I T T.

My policy seemed to me entirely suitable to the lasting security of my own power, of the liberty of my country, and of its maritime greatness. For I made it my care to keep up a very powerful navy, well commanded and officered, for the defence

defence of all these against the English; but, as I feared nothing from France, or any power on the continent, I neglected the army; or rather I destroyed it, by enervating all its strength, by disbanding old troops and veteran officers, attached to the house of Orange, and putting in their place a *trading militia*, commanded by officers who had neither experience nor courage, and who owed their promotions to no other merit, but their relation to or interest with some leading men in the several *oligarchies*, of which the government in all the Dutch towns is composed. Nevertheless, on the invasion of Flanders by the French, I was forced to depart from my close connexion with France, and to concur with England and Sweden in the triple alliance, which Sir William Temple proposed, in order to check her ambition: but as I entered into that measure from necessity, not from choice, I did not pursue it. I neglected to improve our union with England, or to secure that with Sweden; I avoided any conjunction of counsels with Spain; I formed no alliance with the Emperor or the Germans; I corrupted our army more and more; till a sudden, unnatural confederacy, struck up against all the maxims of policy, by the court of England with France, for the conquest of the Seven Provinces, brought these at once to the very brink of destruction, and made me a victim to the fury of a populace too justly provoked.

WILLIAM.

I must say, that your plan was in reality nothing more than to procure for the Dutch a *licence to trade*, under the good *pleasure and gracious protection* of France. But any state that so entirely depends on another, is only a *province*, and its *liberty* is a *servitude* graced with a sweet but empty name. You should have reflected, that to a monarch so ambitious and so vain as *Louis le Grand*, the idea of a conquest, which seemed almost certain, and the desire of humbling a haughty republic,

were

were temptations irresistible. His bigotry likewise would concur in recommending to him an enterprize, which he might think would put heresy under his feet. And if you knew either the character of Charles the Second, or the principles of his government, you ought not to have supposed his union with France for the ruin of Holland an impossible, or even improbable event. It is hardly excusable in a statesman to be greatly surprized, that the inclinations of princes should prevail upon them to act, in many particulars, without any regard to the political maxims and interest of their kingdoms.

D E W I T T.

I am ashamed of my error; but the chief cause of it was, that though I thought very ill, I did not think quite so ill of Charles the Second and his ministry as they deserved. I imagined too that his parliament would restrain him from engaging in such a war, or compel him to engage in our defence, if France should attack us. These, I acknowledge, are *excuses*, not *justifications*. When the French marched into Holland, and found it in a condition so unable to resist them, my shame as a minister irrecoverably sunk. For, not to appear a *traitor*, I was obliged to confess myself a *dupe*. But what praise is sufficient for the wisdom and virtue you shewed, in so firmly rejecting the offers, which I have been informed were made to you, both by England and France, when first you appeared in arms at the head of your country, to give you *the sovereignty of the Seven Provinces*, by the assistance, and under the protection, of the two crowns! Believe me, great prince, had I been living in those times, and had known the generous answers you made to those offers, which were repeated more than once during the course of the war; not the most ancient and devoted servant to your family would have been more your friend than I. But who could reasonably hope for such moderation, and such a right sense of glory, in the mind

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of

See Temple's
Memoirs
from the
year 1672
to 1679. p.
259, 299.

of a young man, descended from *kings*, whose mother was daughter to Charles the First, and whose father had left him the seducing example of a very different conduct? Happy indeed was the English nation to have such a prince so nearly allied to their crown both in blood and by marriage, whom they might call to be their deliverer, when bigotry and despotism, the two greatest enemies to human society, had almost overthrown their whole constitution in church and state!

W I L L I A M.

They might have been happy; but were not.—As soon as I had accomplished their deliverance for them, many of them became my most implacable enemies, and even wished to restore the unforgiving prince, whom they had so unanimously and so justly expelled from his kingdom.—Such levity seems incredible. I could not myself have imagined it possible, in a nation famed for *good sense*, if I had not had proofs of it beyond contradiction. They seemed as much to forget *what they called me over for*, as *that they had called me over*. The security of their religion, the maintenance of their liberty, were no longer their care. All was to yield to the incomprehensible doctrine of *right divine* and *passive obedience*. Thus the *Tories* grew *Jacobites*, after having renounced both that doctrine and James, by their opposition to him, by the invitation of me, and by every act of the parliament which gave me the crown.—But the most troublesome of my enemies were a set of Republicans, who violently opposed all my measures, and joined with the Jacobites in disturbing my government, only because it was not a commonwealth.

D E W I T T.

They who were republicans under your government in the kingdom of England did not love liberty, but aspired to dominion, and wished to throw the nation into a total confusion, that it might give them a chance of working out from that anarchy a better state for themselves.

W I L L I A M.

WILLIAM.
Your observation is just. A proud man thinks himself a lover of liberty, when he is only impatient of a power in government above his own, and, were he a king, or the first minister of a king, would be a tyrant. Nevertheless I will own to you, with the candour which becomes a virtuous prince, that there were in England some Whigs, and even some of the most sober and moderate Tories, who, with very honest intentions, and sometimes with good judgements, proposed new securities to the liberty of the nation, against the prerogative or influence of the crown, and the corruption of ministers in future times. To some of these I gave way, being convinced they were right; but others I resisted, for fear of weakening too much the royal authority, and breaking that *balance*, in which consists the perfection of a mixed form of government. I should not, perhaps, have resisted so many, if I had not seen in the house of commons a disposition to rise in their demands on the crown, had they found it more yielding. The difficulties of my government, upon the whole, were so great, that I once had determined, from mere disgust and resentment, to give back to the nation, assembled in parliament, the crown they had placed on my head, and retire to Holland, where I found more affection and gratitude in the people. But I was stopped by the earnest supplications of my friends, and by an unwillingness to undo the great work I had done: especially as I knew, that, if England should return into the hands of king James, it would be impossible, in that crisis, to preserve the rest of Europe from the dominion of France.

D E W I T T.

Heaven be praised that your majesty did not persevere in so fatal a resolution! The United Provinces would have been ruined by it together with England. But I cannot enough express my astonishment, that you should have met with such

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treatment as could suggest such a thought! The English must
sure be a people incapable either of liberty or subjection!

W I L L I A M.

There were, I must acknowledge, some faults in my temper, and some in my government, which are an excuse for my subjects with regard to the uneasiness and disquiet they gave me. My taciturnity, which suited the genius of the Dutch, offended theirs. They love an affable prince: it was chiefly his affability that made them so fond of Charles the Second. Their frankness and good-humour could not brook the reserve and coldness of my nature. Then the excess of my favour to some of the Dutch, whom I had brought over with me, excited a national jealousy in the English, and hurt their pride. My government also appeared, at last, too unsteady, too fluctuating between the Whigs and the Tories, which almost deprived me of the confidence and affection of both parties. I trusted too much to the integrity and the purity of my intentions, without using those arts that are necessary to allay the ferment of factions and allure men to their duty by soothing their passions. Upon the whole, I am sensible that I better understood how to govern the Dutch than the English or the Scotch, and should probably have been thought a greater man, if I had not been king of Great Britain.

D E W I T T.

It is a shame to the English, that gratitude, and affection for such merit as yours, were not able to overcome any little disgusts arising from your temper, and enthrone their deliverer in the hearts of his people. But will your majesty give me leave to ask you one question? Is it true, as I have heard, that many of them disliked your alliances on the continent, and spoke of your war with France as a *Dutch measure*, in which you sacrificed England to Holland?

The cry of the nation at first was strong for the war: but before the end of it the Tories began publickly to talk the language you mention. And no wonder they did;—for, as they then had a desire to set up again the maxims of government which had prevailed in the reign of their beloved Charles the Second, they could not but represent opposition to France, and vigorous measures taken to restrain her ambition, as unnecessary for England: because they well knew that the counsels of that king had been utterly averse to such measures; that his whole policy made him a friend to France; that he was governed by a French mistress, and even bribed by French money, to give that court his assistance, or at least his acquiescence, in all their designs.

DE WITT.
A king of England, whose cabinet is governed by France, and who becomes a vile pensioner to a French king, degrades himself from his royalty, and ought to be considered as an enemy to the nation. Indeed the whole policy of Charles the Second, when he was not forced off from his natural bias, by the necessity he lay under of soothing his parliament, was a constant, designed, systematical opposition to the interest of his people. His brother, though more sensible to the honour of England, was, by his Popery and desire of arbitrary power, constrained to lean upon France, and do nothing to obstruct her designs on the continent, or lessen her greatness. It was therefore necessary to place the British crown on your head, not only with a view to preserve the religious and civil rights of the people from internal oppressions, but to rescue the whole state from that servile dependance on its natural enemy, which must unquestionably have ended in its destruction. What folly was it to revile your measures abroad, as sacrificing the interest of your British dominions to connexions with the continent, and principally with Holland! had Great Britain no interest to hinder the French from being
masters.

masters of all the Austrian Netherlands, and forcing the Seven United Provinces, her strongest barrier on the continent against the power of that nation, to submit with the rest to their yoke? would her trade, would her coasts, would her capital itself, have been safe, after so mighty an encrease of shipping and sailors, as France would have gained by those conquests? and what could have prevented them, but the war which you waged, and the alliances which you formed? could the Dutch and the Germans, unaided by Great Britain, have attempted to make head against a power, which, even with her assistance, strong and spirited as it was, they could hardly resist? And after the check which had been given to the encroachments of France, by the efforts of the *first grand alliance*, did not a new and greater danger make it necessary to recur to another such league? was not the union of France and Spain under one monarch, or even under one family, the most alarming contingency that ever had threatened the liberty of Europe?

WILLIAM.

I thought so; and I am sure I did not err in my judgement. But folly is blind; and faction wilfully shuts her eyes against the most evident truths that cross her designs; as she believes any lies, however palpable and absurd, that she thinks will assist them.

DE WITT.

The only objection which seems to have any real weight against your system of policy, with regard to the maintenance of a balance of power in Europe, is the enormous expence that must necessarily attend it; an expence which I am afraid neither England nor Holland will be able to bear without extreme inconvenience.

WILLIAM.

I will answer that objection by asking a question. If, when you was pensionary of Holland, intelligence had been brought, that the dykes were ready to break, and the sea was coming in, to

over-

overwhelm and to drown us, what would you have said to one of the deputies, who, when you were proposing the proper repairs to stop the inundation, should have objected to the charge, as too heavy on the province? This was the case in a political sense with both England and Holland. The fences raised to keep out superstition and tyranny were all giving way: those dreadful evils were threatening, with their whole accumulated force, to break in upon us, and overwhelm our ecclesiastical and civil constitution. In such circumstances to object to a necessary expence is folly and madness.

D E W I T T.

It is certain, Sir, that the utmost abilities of a nation can never be so well employed, as in the unwearied, pertinacious defence of their religion and freedom. When *these* are lost, there remains nothing that is worth the concern of a good or wise man. Nor do I think it consistent with the prudence of government not to guard against future dangers, as well as present; which precaution must be often in some degree expensive. I acknowledge too, that the resources of a commercial country, which supports its trade, even in war, by invincible fleets, and takes care not to hurt it in the methods of imposing or collecting its taxes, are immense, and inconceivable till the trial is made; especially where the government, which demands the supplies, is agreeable to the people. But yet an *unlimited* and *continued* expence will in the end be destructive. What matters it whether a state is mortally wounded by the hand of a foreign enemy, or dies by a consumption of its own vital strength? Such a consumption will come upon Holland sooner than upon England, because the latter has a greater radical force: but, great as it is, that force at last will be so diminished and exhausted by perpetual drains, that it may fail all at once, and those efforts, which may seem most surprisingly vigorous, will be in reality *the convulsions of death*. I don't apply this to your majesty's government; but I speak with a view to what may happen.

happen hereafter from the extensive ideas of negociation and war which you have established. They have been salutary to your kingdom; but they will, I fear, be pernicious in future times, if, in pursuing great plans, great ministers do not act with a sobriety, prudence, and attention to frugality, which very seldom are joined with an extraordinary vigour and boldness of counsels.

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DIALOGUE XIX.

M. APICIUS—DARTENEUF.

DARTENEUF.

ALAS! poor Apicius!—I pity thee from my heart, for not having lived in my age and in my country. How many good dishes, unknown at Rome in thy days, have I feasted upon in England!

APICIUS.

Keep your pity for yourself.—How many good dishes have I feasted upon in Rome, which England does not produce, or of which the knowledge has been lost, with other treasures of antiquity, in these degenerate days! The fat paps of a sow, the livers of scari, the brains of phœnicopters, and the *tripotanium*, which consisted of three excellent sorts of fish, for which you English have no names, the *lupus marinus*, the *myxo*, and the *muræna*.

DARTENEUF.

I thought the *muræna* had been our lamprey. We have delicate ones in the Severn!

APICIUS.

No:—the *muræna*, so respected by the ancient Roman fe-nators, was a salt-water fish, and kept by our nobles in ponds, into which the sea was admitted.

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