

Sir William Temple, The crisis of the Dutch Republic, 1673

Introduction: Sir William Temple (1628-1699) served as the English Ambassador to the Dutch Republic from 1668 to 1672 and again from 1674 to 1679. He provided one of the most penetrating analysis and vivid descriptions of the Republic in his *Observations Upon he United Provinces of the Netherlands*, first published in 1672. In that year the Republic both France and England attacked the Republic and many believed that it would not survive. The Dutch refer to 1672 as the *rampjaar*, or year of disaster. The war produced a political crisis in which those in favor of granting greater political authority to the Prince of Orange drove a longtime Republican leader, Johanne de Witt, from office. De Witt was put on trial and was lynched by a mob. Temple was an admirer and friend of de Witt. The selections below are from chapter VIII, "The Causes of their Fall in 1672" in the 1673 edition, which was reprinted, with an interesting introduction, in Sir George Clark's edition (Oxford 1972). The idiosyncratic spelling of the original publication has been retained.

The Causes of their Fall in 1672

It must be avowed, That as This State in the course and progress of its Greatness for so many years past, Has shined like a Comet; So in the Revolutions of this last Summer, It seem'd to fall like a Meteor, and has equally amazed the World by the one and the other: When we consider such a Power and Wealth as was related in the last Chapter, To have fallen in a manner prostrate within the space of one Month: So many Frontier Towns, renowned in the Sieges and Actions of the Spanish Wars, Enter'd like open Villages by the French Troops, without defence, or almost denial: Most of them without any blows at all; and all of them with so few: Their great Rivers, that were esteemed an invincible security to the Provinces of Holland and Utrecht, passed with as much ease, and as small resistances, as little Fords : And in short, the very Hearts of a Nation so valiant of old against Rome, so obstinate against Spain; Now subdued, and in a manner abandoning all before their Danger appeared... I shall therefore set down such Circumstances as to me seem most evidently to have conspired in this Revolution; leaving the Causes less discernable, to the search of more discerning persons.

And first, I take their vast 'Trade, which was an occasion of their Greatness, to have been One likewise of their Fail, by having wholly diverted the Genius of their Native Subjects and Inhabitants, from Arms to 'Traffique, and the Arts of Peace; Leaving the whole fortune of their later Wars, to be managed by Forreign and Mercenary 'Troops; Which much abased the Courage of their Nation (as was observed in another Chapter), and made the Burghers of so little moment

towards the defence of their Towns; Whereas in the famous Sieges of Harlem, Alcmarr, and Leyden, They had made such brave and fierce defences, as broke the heart of the Spanish Armies, and the fortune of their Affairs.

Next was the Peace of Munster, which had left them now, for above Twenty years, too secure of all Invasions or Enemies at Land; And so turn'd their whole application to the strength of their Forces at Sea; Which have been since exercised with two English wars in that time, and enlivened with the small yearly Expeditions into the Streights against the Algerines, and other Corsairs of the Mediterranean.

Another was their too great Parsimony in reforming so many of their best Foreign Officers and Troops, upon the Peace of Munster; whose Valour and Conduct had been so great occasions of inducing Spain to the Counsels and Conclusions of that Treaty. But the greatest of all others that concur'd to weaken, and indeed break the strength of their Land-Milice [militia], Was the alteration of their State, which happen'd by the Perpetual Edict of Holland and West-Friezland, upon the death of the last Prince of Orange, for exclusion of the Power of Stadtholder in their Province, or at least the separation of it from the Charge of Captain-General. Since that time, the main design and application of those Provinces, has been to work out by degrees all the old Officers both Native and Foreign, who had been formerly sworn to the Prince of Orange, and were still thought affectionate to the Interest of that Family; And to fill the Commands of their Army with the Sons or Kinsmen of Burgomasters, and other Officers or Deputies in the State, Whom they esteemed sure to the Constitutions of their Popular Government, and good enough for an Age where they saw no appearance of Enemy at Land to attack them...And being strictly allied both with England and Sweden, in two several Defensive Leagues, and in one common Tripple Alliance[1668]; They could not foresee any danger from France; who they thought would never have the Courage or Force to enter the Lists with so mighty Confederates; and who were sure of a Conjunction, whenever they pleased, both with the Emperor and Spain...

Besides, They knew that France could not attack them without passing thro'ugh Flanders, or Germany: They were sure Spain would not suffer it through the first, if they were backt in opposing it, As foreseeing the inevitable loss of Flanders upon that of Holland: And they could hardly believe the passage should be yeilded by a German Prince, contrary to the express

Will and Intentions of the Emperor, as well as the common Interests of the Empire: So that they hoped the War would at least open in their Neighbours Provinces, For whose defence they resolved to employ the whole Force of their State. And would have made a mighty resistance, if the Quarrel had begun at any other doors but their own.

They could not imagine a Conjunction between England and France for the ruin of their State; For, being unacquainted with our Constitutions, they did not foresee how we should find our Interest- in it, and measured all States by that which They esteemed to be their Interest. Nor could they believe that other Princes and States of Europe would suffer such an addition to be made to the Power of France, as a Conquest of Holland...

These Considerations made them commit three fatal Oversightsin their Foreign Negotiations : For they made an Alliance with England, without engaging a Confidence and Friendship: They broke their Measures with France, without closing new ones with Spain: And they reckon'd upon the Assistancess of Sweden, and their Neighbour-Princes of Germany, without making them sure by Subsidiary Advances, before a War began.

Lastly, The Prince of Orange was approaching the Two and twentieth year of his age, which the States of Holland had, since their Alliance with Her Majesty in 1668, ever pretended, should be the time of advancing him to the Charge of Captain-General, and Admiral of their Forces, Though without that of Stadtholder. But the nearer they drew to this period, which was like to make a new Figure in their Government; the more desirous some of their Ministers seemed either to decline, or to refrain it. On the other side, the Prince grew confident upon the former Promises, or at least Intimations of Holland, and the concurring dispositions of the other Six Provinces to his advancement: And his Party, spirited by their hopes, and the great Qualities of this young Prince (now grown ripe for Action, and for Enterprise), resolved to bring this point to a sudden decision; Against which, the other Party prepared and united all their Defences; So as this strong Disease that had been so long working in the very Bowels of the State, seem'd just upon its Crisis, When a Conjunction of two Mighty Kings brought upon them a sudden and furious Invasion by Land and Sea, at the same time, By a Royal Fleet of .above Fourscore Ships, and an Army of as many thousand men...

There happen'd at the same time, an accident unusual to their Climate, Which was a

mighty Drowth in the beginning of the Summer, that left their waters fordable in places where they used to be navigable for Boats of greatest burthen. And this gave them more trouble and distraction in the defence, as their Enemies more facility in the passage of those great Rivers, which were esteemed no small security of their Countrey.

And in this posture were the Affairs of this Commonwealth when the War broke out, with those fatal Events, that must needs attend any Kingdom or State, where the violence of a Forreign Invasion happens to meet with the distraction of a Domestique Sedition or Discontent, Which, like ill Humours in a Body, make any small wound dangerous, and a great one mortal. They were still a great Body, but without their usual Soul; They were a State, but it was of the Disunited Provinces. Their Towns were without Order; Their Burghers without Obedience; Their Soldiers without Discipline; And all without heart: Whereas in all Sieges, The Hearts of Men defend the Walls, and not Walls the Men: And indeed, it was the Name of England joining in the War against them, that broke their hearts, and contributed more to the loss of so many Towns, and so much Countrey, than the Armies of Munster, or of France. So that upon all circumstances consider'd, it seems easier to give an account, what it was that lost them so much, than what sav'd them the rest...

But as Holland had ever defended it self against Spain, by England and France; So it ought to have done against France, by England and Spain, and provided early against their own danger, as well as that of Flanders, by improving and advancing their Confederate-League with England and Sweden, into a strict Defensive-Alliance with Spain, as a Principal in the League; And by agreeing with that Crown, to furnish between them some constant Subsidiary Payments to Sweden, for the support of their standing-Forces, even in time of Peace. This was the desire of Spain, The Interest of all that meant to secure the Peace of Christendom; And the opinion of some of the Dutch Ministers, Though not of the Chiefest, till it was too late; And the omission of This, was the greatest fault ever committed in their Politicks; And proceeded in a great measure from their ancient animosity to Spain; Which as it was the beginning, so, by this effect, it almost prov'd the end of their State...