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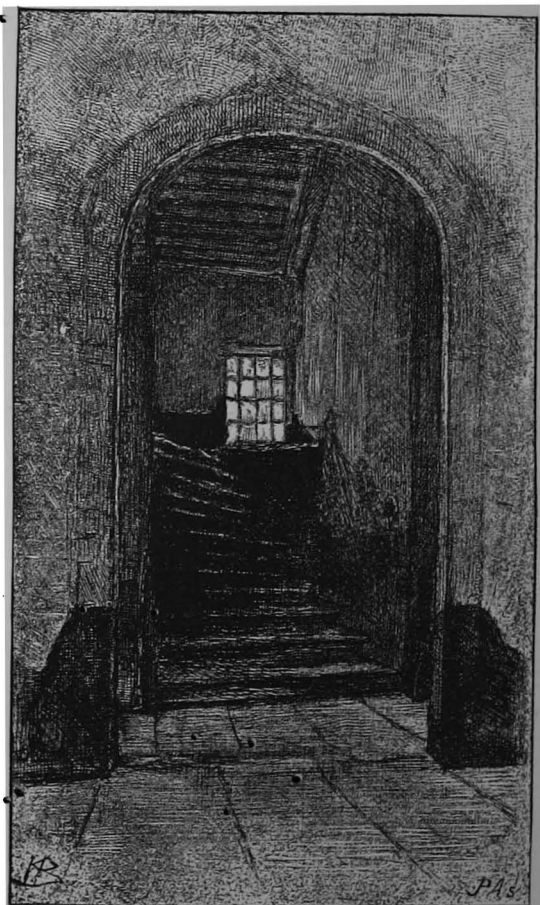
HOLLAND



THE STORY OF THE NATIONS

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STAIRCASE WHERE GÉRARD ASSASSINATED WILLIAM THE SILENT.
Delft, July 12, 1584. (See p. 119.)

HOLLAND

BY THE LATE

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PREFACE.

THE story which is contained in the following pages is, of necessity, brief, for I cannot go beyond the limits of the series. But it need not be given in great detail. It is possible by a short narrative to recount the principal facts in the greatest and most important of all European wars, that in which the seven provinces of Holland secured their independence against the monarch who was supposed to possess the mightiest powers of the age. Holland was won by its people acre by acre, field by field, against the best European troops of the time, the most practised generals, and what seemed to be boundless resources. The details of the struggle are dry and tedious. The interest in the story lies in the spirit and resolution of the Hollanders, in the tenacity with which they clung to their purposes, in the entire success which attended their efforts, and the great results which followed from the victory which they won, after a war of unparalleled duration. The Spanish king, their foe, represented the two principles of sixteenth-century despotism,

entire authority over the lives and fortunes of his subjects, entire authority over their consciences. The Hollanders resisted him, defeated him, and gave the first precedent for civil and religious liberty.

Their success was the stimulant to similar efforts in other countries. These efforts were not always successful; sometimes, indeed, they were defeated, and governments were apparently all the stronger by reason of the failure in the attempt to control them. But the example of the Dutch was never forgotten, and the prosperity of free Holland was always a stimulant to those other races which struggled for freedom. The Huguenots attempted to follow their example, and failed. The Protestant states of Northern and Central Germany strove to free themselves, quarrelled among each other, and after thirty years of desperate and sanguinary warfare, the battle was drawn. England grappled with the despotism of the Stewarts, put it down for a time, suffered from the effects of a shameful reaction, and finally established constitutional monarchy, *i.e.*, an aristocratic republic, disguised by the fiction of a powerless sovereign.

The precedent of the Dutch revolt was before the minds of those who drew up the Declaration of American Independence. I cannot say that the Colonies would not have resisted the British Parliament after the Stamp Act was passed, even if there had been no history of Holland. But precedents are of the highest value in political action, especially if the precedent is one of signal success. In absolute ignorance of what the result would be, the French Government, which was utterly corrupt, selfish, cruel, and tyrannical,

nical, intervened on behalf of American freedom, and materially aided the struggle for independence. The inevitable issue of this intervention was the French Revolution. The final overthrow of the French Empire, after it had fought for eighteen years single-handed against Europe was of course followed by reaction. But slowly, very slowly, European races have within the present generation won back some liberties from the dynasties and their tools, and will in the end, if they are wise, win much more from them. The form which their best efforts take is that of nationality, an impulse which may be misdirected by intriguing politicians, but is gradually being educated into definite aims.

I hold it that the revolt of the Netherlands and the success of Holland is the beginning of modern political science and of modern civilization. It utterly repudiated the divine right of kings, and the divine authority of an Italian priest, the two most inveterate enemies which human progress has had to do battle with. At present, the king in civilized communities is the servant of the state, whose presence and influence is believed to be useful. The priest can only enjoy an authority which is voluntarily conceded to him, but has no authority over those who decline to recognize him. These two principles of civil government the Dutch were the first to affirm. They deposed Philip and put the head of the house of Orange in his place, but only as the highest servant of a free Republic. They refused all concessions to the court of Rome, and, very soon after their independence was secured, accepted the principle of religious equality. Holland

was the solitary European state for a long time, in which a man's religious opinions were no bar to his exercise of all civil rights. At the present time, most civilized communities have followed this excellent example.

The student of history is bidden to take notice of the heroic resistance which Athens first, and much of Southern Greece afterwards made to the Persian king twenty-three centuries ago. The resistance which Holland made to the Spanish king was infinitely more heroic, far more desperate, much more successful, and infinitely more significant, because it was a war in which the highest principles were vindicated, and vindicated irreversibly. In those principles, secured by the efforts of a small and, at first sight, of a feeble people, lies the very life of modern liberty. The debt which rational and just government owes to the seven provinces is incalculable. To the true lover of liberty, Holland is the Holy Land of modern Europe, and should be held sacred.

But the debt of modern Europe to Holland is by no means limited to the lessons which it taught as to the true purposes of civil government. It taught Europe nearly everything else. It instructed communities in progressive and rational agriculture. It was the pioneer in navigation and in discovery; and, according to the lights of the age, was the founder of intelligent commerce. It produced the greatest jurists of the seventeenth century. It was pre-eminent in the arts of peace. The presses of Holland put forth more books than all the rest of Europe did. It had the most learned scholars. The languages of the East

were first given to the world by Dutchmen. It was foremost in physical research, in rational medicine. It instructed statesmen in finance, traders in banking and credit, philosophers in the speculative sciences. For a long time that little storm-vexed nook of North-western Europe was the university of the civilized world, the centre of European trade, the admiration, the envy, the example of nations.

Holland, it is true, committed political and commercial errors, which it dearly expiated, of which a malignant use was made by states and statesmen who committed ten times as many crimes. But the annals of Holland are singularly free from deliberate wrongdoing. Its worst acts were defensive, into which it was led by intriguers, such as the judicial murder of Olden Barneveldt, the foolish advocacy of the exiled Stewarts, the shameful murder of the De Witts. But in these doings it was the accomplice of the house of Orange, which after great services led it into disgrace, and finally into ruin. It was an evil day for Holland, when this degenerate family began to marry into the houses of Stewart and Hanover, of Prussia and Russia.

I would have gladly brought the story to a close with the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, after which, by no fault of its own, Holland became of little account in the councils of Europe, and was finally overrun by France. But the facts had to be told, and they are a striking lesson. In the shameful humiliation of Holland, Great Britain, to its dishonour, took the most active part. From the days of Selden down to the days of Canning, it was the policy of British statesmen to pander

to the most sordid instincts of British traders, and to fruckle to the designs of the houses of Stewart and Hanover against the independence of the gallant Republic. From their own point of view, that of securing allies on the European continent, the policy was entirely unwise; from the point of view of international morality, it was supremely dishonest.

My principal authorities are Davies, Motley, and especially Wagenaar. The annals of the Dutch nation are exceedingly copious and accurate. I wish indeed that we knew more in detail about the particulars of the great manufacturing towns of Flanders before the revolt of the Netherlands, of the great trading towns of the seven provinces during and after the War of Independence. The publication of such records would be of great interest to those who study the stirring history of the Republic, and follow out the process by which such important results ensued from what seemed to be such inadequate means.





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