

CHAPTER IX.

Marlborough's Campaign of 1705.—His disappointment and anxieties.—He forces the French lines.—Retreat of the French under Villeroy.—New Parliament.—State of Parties.—The Regency Bill.—Cry of the Church in danger.—Marlborough's Campaign of 1706 in the Netherlands.—The French and Bavarian armies under Villeroy pass the Dyle.—The battle of Ramillies.—Results of the Victory.

"I NEVER knew the duke of Marlborough go out so full of hopes as in the beginning of this campaign," says Burnet.* He embarked at Harwich on the 31st of March. His ardent expectations were soon cooled by the opposition which the Dutch made to his plans. It was a month before he could get the States to agree to his design of leading the English and Dutch troops to the Moselle, there to co-operate with the forces under prince Louis of Baden; and, marching from Treves between the Moselle and the Saar, to penetrate into Lorraine and thus carry the war into the French territory. Without waiting for the force of Baden, Marlborough crossed the Moselle and the Saar on the 3rd of June. The French armies under Villars and Marsin had united. Marlborough was anxious to give them battle; but they retreated; and he followed, though ill-provided with artillery. He encamped at Elft, and there waited for reinforcements. On the 9th he wrote to Harley, that he had not one man with him but those in the English and Dutch pay. He was desirous to begin the siege of Saar-Louis; yet for want of the troops under the prince of Baden and the Prussians, "we are obliged to be idle a good part of the campaign, while the enemy are pursuing their designs without any manner of interruption." † Such was the essential disadvantage of an army composed of the various contingents of Allied powers, compared with an army of one great military state. In the campaign of the Danube, the English commander, by wonderful exertions, contrived to make a compact body out of many heterogeneous parts. In the campaign of 1705, he had to prove the full difficulty of divided counsels and petty jealousies. Whilst in camp at Elft the weather was bitterly cold; and to this circumstance he attributes in some measure the desertions which weakened his army. On the 15th of June he writes to the States General, that the season

* "Own Time," vol. v. p. 203.

† Dispatches, vol. ii. p. 87.

is so inclement that there is nothing on the earth—that all the grass and oats have been destroyed by the cold—that he has no horses or carriages for the conveyance of heavy artillery, the German princes having utterly failed in their engagements.* Villeroy and the elector of Bavaria were rapidly advancing so as to threaten Holland; and the States, in great alarm, sent express upon express to Marlborough, to march with all haste to their succour. Villeroy had taken Huy, and was investing Liège. Marlborough apprehended that the Dutch would be frightened into a negotiation for peace. The imperturbable general is very nearly broken down with anxiety. He writes to Godolphin on the 16th, "I have for these last ten days been so troubled by the many disappointments I have had, that I think if it were possible to vex me so for a fortnight longer, it would make an end of me. In short, I am weary of my life." † A vigorous resolution roused Marlborough out of this despondency. On the 17th of June, at midnight, he broke up the camp at Elft, and marched back to the position which he had occupied a fortnight before. By a series of rapid movements he united his army with that of the Dutch general, D'Auverquerque; and Villeroy retreated within the formidable lines which the French had constructed, extending from the Meuse, near Namur, to the Scheldt at Antwerp. Marlborough's first object was to regain possession of Huy, in which he succeeded by the capitulation of the garrison on the 11th of July. But this success was accompanied by a bitter mortification. Upon the approach of a French detachment, the Palatine general D'Aubach abandoned Treves and Saarbruch, and burned the magazines which contained stores that were essential to the further prosecution of the operations on the Moselle. Marlborough's disappointments in the campaign were matters of rejoicing to the High Tories in England, who were now distinguished as "the tackers." The great general took this so to heart that he writes to Godolphin, "this vile enormous faction of theirs vexes me so much, that I hope the queen will after this campaign give me leave to retire." ‡ In answer to a consolatory letter from the queen, he writes to her majesty that he has received a list of the new parliament, by which he sees that there are enough tackers returned, to stir everything that may be uneasy to the government; "to prevent which, I think your majesty should advise with lord treasurer [Godolphin], what encouragement may be proper to give the Whigs." But Marlborough does not want the Whigs to be in power. The lord treasurer, he writes "is the only man in England capable of giving such advice as may keep

* "Dispatches," vol. ii. p. 103. † Coxé, vol. ii. p. 122. ‡ *Ibid.*, vol. ii. p. 127.

you out of the hands of both parties, which may at last make you happy, if quietness can be had in a country where there is so much faction."*

The great operation of this campaign was the forcing of the French lines on the 17th of July. This formidable barrier between Dutch Brabant and the Austrian Netherlands, had been three years in construction. In part of their extent the lines followed the course of the river Gheet, and the river Demer; and, at various intervals, were fortified posts of considerable strength. Distributed along convenient parts of the lines was the French army of seventy thousand men. Marlborough maintained his usual secrecy, confiding his plans to no one but Auverquerque. He had determined to attack the lines by passing the Gheet near Leuwe—a part where the greatest difficulties appeared to present themselves. The weaker part of the lines was to the south of the Mehaigne; and thither D'Auverquerque was directed to march, "to give the enemy a jealousy that they were to be attacked on that side, and so oblige them to draw their greatest strength that way."† The feint had its effect. Villeroy collected his main strength on that weak part where D'Auverquerque had crossed the Mehaigne. "But the bridges prepared over the Mehaigne served equally to bring back Auverquerque's troops to the left of that river, and to unite them to the army of Marlborough; and the movements being all made under cover of night, the object aimed at was attained before the enemy could discover which was the real point of attack. The lines were, however, of the most formidable description; for, besides the height of the ramparts and the largeness of the ditch, they were further defended by the difficulties of the ground over which they were to be approached; and by the river Gheet, which could not be crossed without laying bridges over it, and which was near enough to the lines to be defended by the fire from the parapet. All these obstacles would have been sufficient to have rendered the lines unassailable, though defended by a very inferior body against a whole army, but for the ability with which the attention and the main force of the enemy was diverted from the real point of attack, and the energy with which that attack was conducted."‡

During the day of the 17th Villeroy was employed in watching the movements of Auverquerque. At eight o'clock at night a detachment of Marlborough's army began its march towards the Little Gheet river; and at the same time Auverquerque recrossed the

* Coxe, vol. ii. p. 132.

† Sir George Murray's Account, in Dispatches, vol. ii. p. 177.

‡ Bulletin in Dispatches, vol. ii. p. 174.

Mehaigne, and connected his vanguard with the rear of Marlborough. When the morning dawned, the English and Dutch were approaching the French works, concealed by a thick fog. They carried the castle of Wange, and without waiting for the construction of bridges, the troops scrambled through the marshy ground, crossed the Gheet, mounted its slippery banks, rushed into the trench, and were within the enemy's lines. They were encountered by the marquis d'Allegre with twenty battalions of infantry and fifty squadrons of horse. Marlborough himself headed a charge of cavalry, and for a short time, having only a trumpeter and a servant with him, was surrounded as the French repulsed his charge. But the English troops rallied to his rescue; and a second charge left them masters of the lines. Villeroy came up too late, and had no resource but a retreat. Marlborough was anxious to pursue, but the Dutch thought a pursuit hazardous, and he encamped near Tirlemont. L'Allegre was taken prisoner, with four other general officers and a thousand men. Harley wrote to Marlborough, after the news of the success, "Your friends and servants here cannot be without concern upon your grace's account, when we hear how much you expose that precious life of yours upon all occasions, and that you are not contented to do the part of a great general, but you condescend to take your share as a common soldier."* Harley's friend, Swift, ventured to insinuate, after a few years, that Marlborough wanted courage.

Villeroy retreated beyond the Dyle, and there established a strong position near Louvain. Marlborough was prevented taking any immediate offensive measures through the constant interference of the deputies of the States. The English general was indignant, and sent an officer to the Hague, to represent "that unless the command be more absolute in one person, we shall hardly be able to do anything." Councils of war, he said, were called on every occasion, "which entirely destroys the secrecy and despatch upon which all great undertakings depend."† He wanted to force the passage of the Dyle; and he traversed ground which, somewhat more than a century after, became familiar to every Englishman. On the 27th of August he writes to the duke of Shrewsbury, "I had at the camp at Meldert with great difficulty brought together a provision of about ten days' bread; and having marched four days together through several defiles, and part of the Bois des Soignies, the army came the 18th instant into a spacious plain, with only the Yssche between us and the enemy. About noon we were formed in order of battle, and having visited the posts with

* Coxe, vol. ii. p. 149.

† Dispatches, vol. ii. p. 197.

M. D'Auverquerque, we had resolved upon making the attack, thinking there was no more to do but to order the troops to advance, when the Deputies of the States, having consulted their other generals, would not give their consent, so that I was with great regret obliged to quit the enterprise, which promised all imaginable success.* There was a skirmish on the plain of Waterloo. But for the interference of the Dutch Deputies there might have been a decisive battle on that ground, of which Byron wrote after the eventful day of the 18th of June, 1815, "Waterloo seems marked out for the scene of some great action, though this may be mere imagination." The opportunity was lost of anticipating the later glories of that plain. Marlborough wrote to Harley on the 2nd of September, entreating that the government should not take any formal notice at the Hague of his "late disappointment," for "I am persuaded if an opportunity should now offer before our leaving the field, the greatest part of the generals who were against engaging the enemy are too sensible of their error, that they would not obstruct anything that might be proposed for our advantage." He was looking forward to a new pleasure when he returned home. Mr. Vanbrugh had informed him that "the first stone at Woodstock" had been laid, and he compliments the architect upon his plans, saying, "the greatest satisfaction I enjoy on this side is from the hopes I have of finding the house in good forwardness at my return in the winter." †

The Elections of 1705 roused up a bitterness of party-feeling that had rarely been equalled in England. It is difficult to look back upon these times and not to be moved to pity, if not to despise, the people that could be stirred into the most violent wrath against each other by the cry that was raised from the Land's End to Berwick. That cry was, "The Church in danger." The queen had manifested less disinclination to transfer a portion of her favour to the Whigs. The High-churchmen gave out the rallying-cry from their pulpits. The Jacobite and Tory pamphleteers told the nation "that the Church was to be given up; that the bishops were betraying it; that the Court would sell it to the Dissenters." ‡ The elections seem to have been managed in a most extraordinary way, if we may judge from Defoe's description of the election which he saw at Coventry. Mobs drawn up in battle-array, were fighting in the streets; whilst freemen, or pretended freemen, went up to vote, without any examination of their qualifications—no list of voters—no oath tendered—no books kept. "The Dissenters," says Burnet, "who had been formerly much divided, were now

* Dispatches, vol. ii. p. 237.

† *Ibid.*, p. 247.

‡ Burnet, vol. v. p. 218.

united entirely in the interests of the government, and joined with the Whigs every where." It was seen that the Whigs would have a parliamentary majority; so Godolphin declared in their favour "more openly than he had done formerly." The duke of Newcastle was made Lord Privy Seal in the place of the duke of Buckingham. The incapable and violent sir Nathan Wright was removed from the office of Lord Keeper, and Mr. William Cowper was appointed to that high place.

When the Parliament met at the end of October the contest of the Commons began with the election of Speaker. The Whig candidate, Mr. John Smith, had a majority. The queen's speech complained of the malicious insinuations that the Church was in danger. "I will always affectionately support and countenance the Church of England as by law established. I will invariably maintain the Toleration. I will do all I can to persuade my subjects to lay aside their divisions, and will study to make them all safe and easy." This was plainer language than had been spoken since the time when William uttered what he thought from that throne. The Tories were angry with the queen, and they took a course which they judged would annoy her. Anne looked with little real complacency upon the Act of Settlement. Lord Haversham, one of the Tory leaders, moved in the Lords, that the princess Sophia of Hanover should be invited to reside in England, as presumptive heir of the crown. The motion was negatived, although very strongly supported by Buckingham, Rochester, and other Tory peers. The queen was indignant, for "these very persons, having now lost that interest in her and their posts, were driving on that very motion which they had made her apprehend was the most fatal thing that could befall." * So queen Anne writes to the duchess of Marlborough, "I believe dear Mrs. Freeman and I shall not disagree as we have formerly done; for I am sensible of the services that those people have done me that you have a good opinion of, and will countenance them; and am thoroughly convinced of the malice and insolence of them that you have always been speaking against."

The question of the Succession being thus stirred again by the Tories, the Whigs proposed a measure which had some practical utility. They brought forward a Bill for appointing a Regency, which should carry on the government, in the case of the demise of the queen, until the arrival of her successor. The regents were to consist of the archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Keeper, the Lord Chief Justice, and four great officers of state. The bill

* *John Cowper's "Diary."* † *Dispatches*, vol. ii. p. 237.

* Burnet, vol. v. p. 227.

was carried. Halifax moved in the Lords that an inquiry should be made into the alleged danger of the Church. After a long debate it was voted by a majority of sixty-one peers against thirty, that the Church was not in danger. The Lords and Commons then subsequently agreed in the following resolution: "Resolved by the Lords spiritual and temporal, and Commons in parliament assembled, that the Church of England, as by law established, which was rescued from the extremest danger by King William III., of glorious memory, is now, by God's blessing, under the happy reign of her majesty, in a most safe and flourishing condition, and whosoever goes about to suggest and insinuate, that the Church is in danger under her majesty's administration, is an enemy to the queen, the Church, and the kingdom." The queen then issued a proclamation, at the instance of Parliament, declaring that "we will proceed with the utmost severity the law should allow of, against the authors or spreaders of the said seditious and scandalous reports"—namely, that the Church is in danger. To us, at the distance of a century and a half, the whole affair seems ludicrous and beneath the gravity of parliamentary proceedings. In three years more, we shall see the nation stirred to a temporary frenzy by the same spirit of ecclesiastical controversy, displaying itself in absurdity still more outrageous, as it now must appear. But, after all, we cannot regard these things with the eyes of our forefathers, and must judge the actors in them with that charity in which they appear to have been themselves deficient.

Godolphin and Marlborough are dining in perfect cordiality with Halifax, Cowper, and Sunderland, at Harley's house; and Harley drinks "to love and friendship and everlasting union, and wishes he had more Tokay to drink it in."* Marlborough is setting his face against jobbery, with exemplary fortitude. Lord Albemarle wants a commission for some lower-school boy of Eton or Westminster. The queen, replies Marlborough, "has lately shown so much aversion to anything of that kind, upon notice taken in Parliament, of children's being commissioned in the troops, that she has given me repeated orders to the contrary."† Disinterested is he also in the management of one of the corruptions of that day, which still flourishes in its original luxuriance,—the sale of commissions. Mrs. Selwin is unreasonable enough to be "dissatisfied with the offer I have made Mr. Selwin of a company in the Guards, upon his laying down eight hundred pounds. . . . I could wish Mr. Selwin might have it for nothing, but there is a necessity of applying this sum at least in charity to the

* Lord Cowper's "Diary"—Hardwicke Papers.

† Dispatches, vol. ii. p. 437.

widows, and to satisfy other pretensions."* Such are the occupations of the great captain, before he gets out of England to his accustomed battle-ground. He goes at last, and is at the Hague on the 27th of April. His notion of a campaign in 1706 was to shift his ground; to go to the relief of the Duke of Savoy, who was expected to be besieged; and to co-operate with prince Eugene in freeing Italy from the French armies. This plan had the countenance of the English ministry. But the elector of Hanover would not consent that his troops should assist in Marlborough's project; and the Danes and Hessians also refused their co-operation. Meanwhile the French on the Upper Rhine had obtained some successes; and thus the Dutch again became alarmed for their own safety. Marlborough consented to remain in the command of the English and Dutch armies, provided that his power was unfettered. To this the States consented; and the troops began to march from the Hague on the 7th of May. They were to be joined by various garrisons, and to encamp near Maestricht. On the 15th Marlborough wrote to the duchess to inform her that, in all likelihood he should make the whole campaign in the Netherlands—not such a campaign as would please him. "Let me say for myself that there is more credit in doing what is good for the public, than in preferring our private satisfaction and interest; for my being here in a condition of doing nothing that shall make a noise, has made me able to send ten thousand men to Italy, and to leave nineteen thousand more on the Rhine."† The great general scarcely saw the opportunity of "making a noise," that he would be able to insure in little more than a week after he had reluctantly turned away from the plan that would best promote his "private satisfaction and interest." On the 20th of May, he wrote to Harley to express his hope that he might bring the enemy to a battle, for the French had drawn all their garrisons together, had passed the Dyle, and were posted at Tirlemont. In a letter of the next day to M. Hop, at the Hague, he says that this movement of the enemy "has quite broken the measures we were projecting at Maestricht. . . . We design to advance to gain the head of the Gheet, to come to the enemy if they keep their ground. For my part, I think nothing could be more happy for the Allies than a battle; since, I have good reason to hope, with the blessing of God we may have a complete victory."‡ There is nothing more remarkable than the unswerving confidence of Marlborough in his own happy fortune. Here were no particular circumstance to in-

* Dispatches, vol. ii. p. 441.

† Coxe, vol. ii. p. 335.

‡ Dispatches, vol. ii. p. 118.

spire him with this confidence. He had no superiority of numbers; for his English, Dutch, and Danes amounted to sixty thousand men, whilst Villeroy's army of French and Bavarians amounted to sixty-two thousand. He had no superiority in the distribution of his forces in his advance to battle; and in the same way as at Blenheim, he found the enemy in possession of the ground which he had hoped to take up. The famous novelist, who has described the men and manners of these times with a rare fidelity, has truly said, "The great duke always spoke of his victories with an extraordinary modesty, and as if it was not so much his own admirable genius and courage which achieved these amazing successes, but as if he was a special and fatal instrument in the hands of Providence, that willed irresistibly the enemy's overthrow. . . . And our army got to believe so, and the enemy learnt to think so too."*

It was Whitsunday, the 23rd of May, when Marlborough begun his march, at three o'clock in the morning, to gain the open space between the Mehaigne and the Great Gheet. † That position was found to be occupied by the enemy. The Allies, in eight columns, passed the once formidable lines which had been demolished in the preceding year; and having cleared the village of Mierdorp, formed in order of battle in the plain of Jandrinœuil. The enemy was posted in two lines on eminences above the marshes, stretching from the Little Gheet to the Mehaigne, having the village of Ramilies in the centre. It was a formidable position. From Mierdorp, near which the Allies crossed the lines, to Ramilies, was a distance of nearly three miles. The whole plain, about three miles in breadth, is bounded on the north by the Little Gheet, on the south by the Mehaigne. The plain narrows towards the west, being bounded by the rising ground through which the Little Gheet flows from its sources near Ramilies. ‡ Villeroy waited for the attack in his camp, on the rising ground of Mont St. André, a plain with gentle undulations and interspersed with coppices. Behind this rising ground is the Great Gheet. The Allies formed their order of battle in the plain, between the village of Boniffe, on the Mehaigne, and the village of Foulaz, on the Little Gheet,—having two lines, the infantry in the centre, the cavalry on the wings, with twenty squadrons of Danes to support the left of the infantry. In this order Marlborough advanced to the western extremity of the plain. Ramilies, an enclosed village, was defended by

* Thackeray, "Esmond," chap. xii. on the same subject.

† Letter to Eugene, "Dispatches," vol. ii. p. 525.

‡ There is an excellent plan in the Atlas to Coxe; and another, not very dissimilar, in Tindal.

twenty battalions of French. Between Ramilies and the marshes of the Mehaigne, were posted nearly the whole of the French cavalry. Their centre and left, composed of infantry, extended from the village of Autre-église to the village of Offuy, and thence behind Ramilies. Marlborough determined to make a demonstration of attack upon the left of the French, at Autre-église and Offuy. Villeroy immediately drew his troops from the centre to support his left. Marlborough had the advantage of moving in a smaller space than the enemy, whose position formed an arc on the hills, while the allies could traverse the chord of the plain. Directly Villeroy had weakened his centre, Marlborough ordered the second line of the troops that were advancing to Autre-église, to defile to the left by a hollow way that concealed them. The first line of his right wing ascended the rising ground at Autre-église, and opened their fire. But the main brunt of the battle was on his left, where the French were attacked at Ramilies and at Tavieres, a village on the Mehaigne. The assault on Tavieres by the Dutch infantry was successful. But the French cavalry then came into conflict with the Dutch cavalry under Auverquerque, and repelled them in great disorder. This was the crisis of the battle. The vast body of French and Bavarian horse had every chance of taking in the rear the Allied infantry who were attacking Ramilies. Marlborough saw the danger. He put himself at the head of seventeen squadrons, and charged the French cavalry. This was indeed a fight of horse to horse, to be decided by main strength more than strategy. Marlborough, who was recognised, was surrounded and nearly made prisoner. He cut his way through; his charger fell; his equerry had his head shot off by a cannon ball as he held the stirrup for his general to mount another horse. But now a reserve of cavalry that Marlborough had sent for, came up; and an irresistible charge determined the battle on the left. The Allies mounted the heights above Ramilies, and the shout of victory announced that the position had been gained which insured an ultimate success. The conflict was not over in and around the village of Ramilies. The fight amongst the cottages was long and doubtful. But the ever-watchful general ordered up a reserve of infantry, and the Allied horse, descending from their heights, their united force completed the triumph of the left and centre. Three hours had been occupied in these terrible encounters. But the changes of fortune had been so various—the confusion of onset and retreat so great—the disorder attendant upon troops of all arms being mixed in one common effort so extreme, that Marlborough was compelled to form his forces again upon the ground

they had won. Villeroy now endeavoured to take up a new line, but was impeded by his own baggage. Before he could get his battalions formed, Marlborough ordered a general advance to the sources of the Little Gheet; but before the morasses were crossed the French began to fly, and one headlong panic and slaughter closed that fearful evening. Onward went the pursued and the pursuers towards Louvain. Marlborough did not halt till he had reached Mildert, thirteen miles from the battle-field. The elector of Bavaria and Villeroy reached Louvain at two o'clock on the morning of the 24th; held a council in the market-place by torch-light; and determined to abandon their fortified towns, and save the remnant of their force by a hurried retreat. The French and Bavarians lost seven thousand men, killed and wounded, and six thousand prisoners. The Allies lost nearly four thousand men. The artillery, baggage, and eighty standards, were the spoil of the victors.

On the 3rd of June Marlborough wrote to St. John, "it is very astonishing that the enemy should give up a whole country, with so many strong places, without the least resistance." He had entered Louvain without meeting any obstacle. Malines, Alost, and other places had submitted. The Estates of Brabant assembled at Brussels had acknowledged the authority of king Charles III., and they sent out their commands to other fortified towns to make a like submission. Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges, and Oudenarde were surrendered without a shot being fired. In his exultation Marlborough exclaimed in his letters home, "now is the time, certainly, to reduce France to reason." St. Simon says, "with the exception of Namur, Mons, and a very few other places, all the Spanish Low Countries were lost." The king, he tells us, felt this misfortune to the quick, however tranquilly he appeared to sustain it. But there was work still to do, before that campaign was ended. Ostend was besieged by a powerful land force and by nine ships of the line. The garrison of five thousand men capitulated on the 7th of July. Menin, one of the greatest fortresses of Vauban, was carried by assault, with immense loss, on the 22nd of August. Dendermonde surrendered on the 5th of September. It might long have held out, had there not been seven weeks of excessive drought, which enabled the besiegers to approach, without being held back by the inundation which the besiegers could command in ordinary seasons. Ath was the last fortress to fall on the 4th of October.

Marlborough returned home to receive the thanks of Parliament, and to take part in the great event of the Session of 1706-7,—the

union of England and Scotland into one kingdom. But the victor at Ramillies had already done far more for this object than anything he could do by his political influence. "If it were to be asked what one man did most for the accomplishment of the Union, it would not be unreasonable to say it was the duke of Marlborough."* At the precise juncture when the campaign of 1706 had inflicted a blow upon France that left her in dread of her own dismemberment, instead of holding the fate of Europe in her hands, the Jacobites of both kingdoms, and some not so honest as the Jacobites, were looking to the aid of the great Louis to prevent the ruin of Scotland, by preventing her entering upon an equal partnership in the liberties, the power, and the glory of England. The king of France was invited to invade Scotland. The invitation was not responded to, for the very obvious reason that the policy of William III., and the victories of the duke of Marlborough, had saved England from being a tributary of France, and now stood between Scotland and the real degradation which some of her children would have regarded as independence.

* Burton, "History of Scotland," vol. p. 438.