MY starting-point is the memorable year 1813, when the Dutch shook off the French yoke. If that glorious event may be called a revolution, one should immediately add that it turned out to be a rather second-rate one, decidedly not conspicuous for large-scale heroism or revolutionary fervour. For its success, conditioned of course by the allied victory over Napoleon, should be credited before all others one great man, the former regent Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp. This man wished to prevent the allied conquest of his country because it might have resulted in the treatment of the Netherlands as an occupied territory.

The social and political élite of the country as a whole, however, did not prove to be up to the crisis. Most members of the leading classes showed themselves great masters in playing a waiting game. Irresolution and passivity were more characteristic of their attitude than revolutionary courage and élan. This lack of energy, this apathy, which was to last for a considerable time to come, can easily be understood. For several decades already the situation of the Dutch commercial commonwealth had been continuously deteriorating. Years of stagnation had been succeeded since 1795 by a period of obvious decline, and after the year 1810, when Napoleon annexed the country to his empire, this decline threatened to end in sheer disaster. No wonder, then, that the great merchants and bankers, so long the leading elements in Dutch society, felt frustrated. Their feelings of impotence were naturally an important element in the generally prevailing apathy. In addition the political fortunes of the country during a considerable space of time had increased the sense of frustration. Since the end of the previous century the Dutch had been at the mercy of the autocrat in Paris. They had seen their political fate being deter-
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mined by the result of incessant wars, which they could only watch from afar.

Seen objectively – which in this case also means seen in the light of later events – there is no doubt at all that the position of the liberated Dutch state among the other European powers was not a favourable one, even if compared with that of the old Republic at the end of the Ancien Régime. In general the post-Napoleonic state was more centralised than its eighteenth-century predecessor, and it was in all respects more powerful. On the whole, however, the greater states had profited much more than the smaller ones, as the situation of the new Dutch state might alone suggest. We may think, for instance, simply of the military aspect. The institution of mercenary troops had enabled the rich Dutch commonwealth to play a role in the field which evidently did not quite correspond with the small number of its inhabitants or with their rather poor military spirit. And yet the modern army system, modelled on French and Prussian example, did diminish Dutch military strength by comparison with that of most other countries.

As to the economic prospect, it seems obvious enough to us that the old Dutch staple market was doomed in 1813. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the strength of that famous system had already been sapped by the mercantilist practices of other countries, and in the course of the century its decline had continued steadily. In the year 1813, at the very moment when Great Britain’s supremacy in world trade appeared unassailable and when continental governments were more inclined than ever before to promote their own subjects’ economic welfare (being now more capable of doing so), at the very moment, too, when Dutch trade had come to a deadlock, the Dutch clearly had no real chance of restoring their staple market, the achievements of which during the seventeenth century had been conditioned in fact by the backwardness and political crises of its potential rivals.

How did the Dutch themselves envisage their situation after being liberated from French domination? First and most obviously, they felt greatly relieved, freed from the oppression of a recent past which was looked upon as a bad dream. Above all, they wanted to be themselves again and hankered after peace and order, security and stability. The structure conceived by them of the