CHAPTER XVII

RELATIONS WITH GERMANY: FAILURE OF NEUTRALITY

EFFECT OF GERMAN UNIFICATION ON DUTCH SECURITY

The Dutch policy of neutrality was largely based on the assumption that the chief, if not exclusive, threat to Netherlands security came from the side of France. With Belgium’s permanent status of neutrality guaranteed by the great powers and with England’s known interest in maintaining an independent Netherlands, the Dutch felt fairly secure.

The position of the Netherlands in world politics was analyzed with great keenness and frankness by an anonymous writer in 1862.1 He pointed out that while the Netherlands was without political importance, it was nevertheless by reason of its strategic position an exceptionally important spot. None of the great powers could afford to see Holland fall under the control of another, for that would destroy the balance of power in Europe. The writer frankly recognized Netherlands dependence on Britain, especially because of its large overseas territories. Since the Netherlands was most vulnerable at sea and had no navy of its own, only an alliance with whomsoever was master of the sea could save it from the loss of its richest source of aid. Because the British controlled the seas an alliance with England was a necessity for the Netherlands if the retention of its colonies, the maintenance of its trade and shipping and the continued intercourse with its overseas possessions were to be ensured. Moreover, the Dutch could defend themselves least well in an attack from the sea. “In an alliance with England we have Belgium between us and France, Prussia beside us, while the sea remains open.” The anonymous writer seemed to assume an unwritten, informal alliance with Britain and also a continued policy of neutrality. Because of the great interests involved an alliance with England was indispensable, “but our obligations to Europe demand that

1 De Politieke en strategische toestand van Nederland en zijne overzeesche besittingen getoetst aan eigenbelangen en zelfbehoud.

A. Vandenbosch, Dutch Foreign Policy Since 1815
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we maintain our independence as necessary for the balance of power in Europe.” With the outbreak of war between the great powers the Netherlands must be prepared to maintain neutrality “to a certain degree” but if this is violated in any way, or France should violate Belgian neutrality, the Netherlands should choose sides. It should unite in a defensive alliance with England, Prussia and Belgium.

It is interesting to note that the above writer was thinking primarily in terms of security against French aggression. This is understandable since he wrote just before the unification of Germany, which created a new situation for the Netherlands. Yet at the time he wrote there already were signs indicating danger from this direction.

Throughout the nineteenth century there were Germans who propagated the idea that the Netherlands had no right of separate existence and that Germany could not live without possession of the mouth of the Rhine. As early as 1803 Ernst Moritz Arndt began a Pan-German movement with his book, *Deutschland und Europa*, in which he bemoaned an independent Netherlands as "A crying mutilation of the natural boundaries of Germany." ¹ This was the theme of all Pan-Germans from Arndt through Friederich List to Count Ernst zu Reventlow and Adolf Lasson in World War I.

From their side the Dutch early developed an antipathy towards Germans. Jacob Cats, statesman and popular poet, generally known as "Father Cats," writing in the first half of the seventeenth century characterized the Germans as follows:

*When the "Mof"² is poor and naked*
*He speaks a very modest language,*
*But when he comes to high estate*
*He does evil to God and man.*

As early as 1844 a Dutch scholar, J. Hora Siccama, warned his fellow countrymen that the “rising Germany already speaks of the river mouths as hers, and, moreover, wishes to confer upon us the blessings of the fatherland.” ³ In 1847 the Amsterdam

¹ A brief survey of the leaders and literature of this movement can be found in “Duitsland, Nederlands belager in de 19e en 20e eeuw,” by G. A. Boon in *Knickerbocker Weekly*, July 10 and July 26, 1944.
² A contemptuous Dutch nickname for Germans.
³ Quoted by Boon, op. cit. For Dutch reactions to Prussian expansion and politics see also C. Smit, op. cit., pp. 249ff.