



A History of Holland

George Edmundson

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The title, "History of Holland," given to this volume is fully justified by the predominant part which the great maritime province of Holland took in the War of Independence and throughout the whole of the subsequent history of the Dutch state and people. In every language the country, comprising the provinces of Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Friesland, Gelderland, Overijssel and Groningen, has, from the close of the sixteenth century to our own day, been currently spoken of as Holland, and the people (with the solitary exception of ourselves) as 'Hollanders.' It is only rarely that the terms the Republic of the United Provinces, or of the United Netherlands, and in later times the Kingdom of the Netherlands, are found outside official documents. Just as the title "History of England" gradually includes the histories of Wales, of Scotland, of Ireland, and finally of the widespread British Empire, so is it in a smaller way with the history that is told in the following pages. That history, to be really complete, should begin with an account of mediaeval Holland in the feudal times which preceded the Burgundian period; and such an account was indeed actually written, but the plan of this work, which forms one of the volumes of a series, precluded its publication.

The character, however, of the people of the province of Holland, and of its sister and closely allied province of Zeeland, its qualities of toughness, of endurance, of seamanship and maritime enterprise, spring from the peculiar amphibious nature of the country, which differs from that of any other country in the world. The age-long struggle against the ocean and the river floods, which has converted the marshes, that lay around the mouths of the Rhine, the Meuse and the Scheldt, by toilsome labour and skill into fertile and productive soil, has left its impress on the whole history of this people. Nor must it be forgotten how largely this building up of the elaborate system of dykes, dams and canals by which this water-logged land was transformed into the Holland of the closing decades of the sixteenth century, enabled her people to offer such obstinate and successful resistance to the mighty power of Philip II.

The earliest dynasty of the Counts of Holland—Dirks, Floris, and Williams—was a very remarkable one. Not only did it rule for an unusually long period, 922 to 1299, but in this long period without exception all the Counts of Holland were strong and capable rulers. The fiefs of the first two Dirks lay in what is now known as North Holland, in the district called Kennemerland. It was Dirk III who seized from the bishops of Utrecht some swampy land amidst the channels forming the mouth of the Meuse, which, from the bush which covered it, was named Holt-land (Holland or Wood-land). Here he erected, in 1015, a stronghold to collect tolls from passing ships. This stronghold was the beginning of the town of Dordrecht, and from here a little later the name Holland was gradually applied to the whole county. Of his successors the most illustrious was William II (1234 to 1256) who was crowned King of the Romans at Aachen, and would have received from Pope Innocent IV the imperial crown at Rome, had he not been unfortunately drowned while attempting to cross on horseback an ice-bound marsh...

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