

*Cover Illustrations by the Author after two drawings by François Boucher.*

## Contents

Note on Dates	iii.
Introduction	1.
Chapter I - <i>The Coming of the Dutchman: Prior's Diplomatic Apprenticeship</i>	7.
Chapter II - <i>'Mat's Peace', the betrayal of the Dutch, and the French friendship</i>	17.
Chapter III - <i>The Treaty of Commerce and the Empire of Trade</i>	33.
Chapter IV - <i>Matt, Harry, and the Idea of a Patriot King</i>	47.
Conclusion - <i>'Britannia Rules the Waves' – A seventy-year legacy</i>	63.
Bibliography	67.

**Note on Dates:**

The dates used in the following are those given in the sources from which each particular reference comes, and do not make any attempt to standardize on the basis of either the Old or New System. It should also be noted that whilst Englishmen used the Old System at home, it was common (and Matthew Prior is no exception) for them to use the New System when on the Continent.

## Introduction

It is often the way with historical memory that the man seen by his contemporaries as an important powerbroker is remembered by posterity as little more than a minor figure. As is the case with many men of the late-Seventeenth- and early-Eighteenth-Centuries, Matthew Prior's (1664-1721) is hardly a household name any longer. Yet in the minds of his contemporaries and in the political life of his country even after his death his importance was, and is, very clear. Since then he has been the subject of three full-length biographies, published in 1914, 1921, and 1939, all now out of print.<sup>1</sup> Although of low birth Prior managed to attract the attention of wealthy patrons in both literary and diplomatic circles and was, despite his humble station, blessed with an education that was to be the foundation of his later success. Educated at the Westminster School with the Halifax brothers, he was to go on to St. John's College, Cambridge, and when 'discovered' by the Earl of Dorset reading Horace in a tavern was taken up and sent into society such as he had never seen.<sup>2</sup>

Such obscurity was to pass as Prior became the man of letters and affairs who was at one time connected to every important personage in Europe, but these main events of his life are to form the main body of this dissertation.<sup>3</sup> Suffice it to say, that he was sent by his

---

<sup>1</sup> Another exists from the 1980's, but it is only a literary study rather than a true biography. See F.M. Rippy; Matthew Prior. Twayne Publishers. Boston. 1986.

<sup>2</sup> The story is that Prior was discovered reading Horace by Dorset, who asked him to render a piece into English. Charmed and impressed by the skill of the young man as a poet and translator he took him under his wing and was instrumental in exposing his poetry to the public and in placing him in the diplomatic circles where his skills in translation were to be so effectively used. (See footnote immediately below for sources of various versions of this story).

<sup>3</sup> For details of the life of Matthew Prior see The HISTORY of His Own Time. Compiled from the ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS Of His late EXCELLENCY MATTHEW PRIOR Esq; Revised and Signed by Himself, and Copied fair for the Press by Mr. ADRIAN DRIFT, His Executor. Printed for the Editor. London. 1740.; F. Bickley; The Life of Matthew Prior. Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons Ltd. London. 1914.; L.G.W. Legg; Matthew Prior: A Study of His Public Career and Correspondence. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1921.; C.K. Eves; Matthew Prior: Poet and Diplomatist. Columbia University Press. New York. 1939.

friend Dorset to The Hague in 1691, and served his diplomatic apprenticeship there in 1697, he served a period as virtual resident in France after that peace, was subsequently given a post with the Board of Trade, and ousted from that position in 1706. By 1710 he was of supreme importance to the new treaty of peace as a negotiator, and was to serve another period as ambassador (unofficially) to France before being once again ejected from his offices at the beginning of the reign of George I. For his diplomatic pains he was imprisoned for a year by the new government as a result of his involvement with the supposedly traitorous Treaty of Utrecht, and lived out his days without any more public appointments, dying in 1721 at the country seat of his friend the Earl of Oxford. Throughout the entire period Prior was writing excellent poetry, however it is not the intention of the present author to discuss him as a poet, merely to make use of some of his literary output in light of his political and diplomatic achievements, achievements which were to form the basis of much of Tory policy leading up to the French Revolution in the hands of another friend, Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke.

The events of Prior's life took place against a backdrop of remarkable change in the three areas in which he was to have his greatest impact; that is to say, in foreign policy, commerce, and party politics. Much of this was driven by the rivalry of what were at the time the three main European powers within Europe and the wider world, as the Dutch, English, and French fought against and alongside one another for control of global markets and trading bases. Between the passing of the Navigation Act in 1651 and the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 five major wars took place, all but the first involving all three powers, with in each case two ranged against one. The First Dutch War saw England attempt to take

trade from the Dutch,<sup>4</sup> the Second Dutch War (1665-67), begun by attempts to seize Dutch colonies,<sup>5</sup> resulted in a Franco-Dutch alliance against the English (1666-67) and ended with an Anglo-Dutch-Swedish alliance. The Third Dutch War began because of an alliance between England and France,<sup>6</sup> and ended for the English in 1674 due to widespread disgust with the policy of attempting to crush the Dutch Republic.<sup>7</sup> The invasion of England by a Dutch army at the Glorious Revolution in 1688 inaugurated a new Anglo-Dutch alliance against the French that was to last through the War of the League of Augsburg (1688-97),<sup>8</sup> and the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-13). From 1711 to 1713 it was the actions of Matthew Prior and the ministry he supported that led to another shift, this time back to the Anglo-French alliance and Anglo-Dutch rivalry, a shift that caused talk at the time of a 'Fourth Dutch War'. Finally, with the new Hanoverian monarchy in Britain after 1714, the French again became the enemy and a century of warfare between the two nations raged almost without the interruption of peace or friendship. By that stage the Dutch power was on the wane,<sup>9</sup> and the 1713 treaty had established Britain as the master of the seas and of the imperial world.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> S. Schama; The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age. Fontana Press. London. 1991. p. 230. See also G. Davies; The Early Stuarts, 1603-1660. Second Edition. Oxford University Press. London. 1959. pp. 220-23.

<sup>5</sup> Hair and Law; 'The English in Western Africa to 1700.' in N. Canny (Ed.); The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume I. The Origins of Empire. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2001. (1998.) p. 250.

<sup>6</sup> J. Scott; England's Troubles: Seventeenth-Century English Political Instability in European Context. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 2000. p. 174.; G.E. Aylmer; 'Navy, State, Trade, and Empire.' in Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume I. pp. 469-70.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 430.

<sup>8</sup> This was due largely to the personal power of King William, identified recently as "Captain-General of resistance to the Apollo of Versailles." Schama; Embarrassment of Riches. p. 250.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 283. Schama here gives no exact period, and there are disagreements about the exact timing of the Dutch financial decline, but most centre around the 1720's and 1730's, Charles Wilson putting it unequivocally in the 1730's. See C. Wilson; Anglo-Dutch Commerce and Finance in the Eighteenth Century. Cambridge University Press. London. 1966. (1941.) pp. 16-27.

<sup>10</sup> See J.I. Israel; 'The Emerging Empire: The Continental Perspective, 1650-1713.' in Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume I. p. 423.; P.K. O'Brien; 'Inseparable Connections: Trade, Economy, Fiscal State,

Nourishing and nourished by the military/territorial conflict were commercial differences between the three great trading nations. By the second half of the Seventeenth-Century both the Spanish and Portuguese were on the defensive and had lost most of the control they had enjoyed during the Sixteenth-Century. The prevailing doctrine of mercantilism was dogma to the French and English throughout the period,<sup>11</sup> yet the Dutch were more inclined towards free and unfettered trade and the freedom of the seas (at least in terms of the rhetoric used).<sup>12</sup> Disputes regarding *mare clausum* and *mare liberum* predominated in the early Seventeenth-Century, particularly between the great commercial rivals, the English and Dutch.<sup>13</sup> By the time of Mr. Prior's involvement with the Treaty of Commerce, intended to accompany that of Peace at Utrecht, all three powers were speaking the language of free-trade (or at least the early-Eighteenth-Century version of it) despite their continued concern with restricting trade to and from their own colonies through this period and during the rest of the century.<sup>14</sup>

In Britain trading disputes were to manifest themselves, as everything had since the Civil Wars, in party acrimony, and that is the third sphere in which Matthew Prior was to have considerable impact, and was capable of foreseeing the shape of things to come. Much of the change in England (and after 1707, Britain) was to originate from, or at the very least

---

and the Expansion of Empire, 1688-1815.' in P.J. Marshall (Ed.); The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume II. The Eighteenth Century. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2001. (1998). p.65.

<sup>11</sup> Embodied in the protectionist English Navigation Act of 1651. See J. Scott; "Good Night Amsterdam." Sir George Downing and Anglo-Dutch Statebuilding.' in The English Historical Review. Vol. 118. i. 476. April 2003. p. 347. See also M.J. Braddick; 'The English Government, War, Trade, and Settlement, 1625-1688.' in Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume I. pp. 293-94.

<sup>12</sup> Schama; Embarrassment of Riches. p. 260.

<sup>13</sup> The argument for *mare liberum* came from the Dutchman Hugo Grotius in the book of the same name, that for *mare clausum* from the Englishmen John Selden and William Monson in response to that of Grotius. See D. Armitage (Ed.); 'Introduction.' in H. Grotius; The Free Sea. trans. R. Hakluyt. Liberty Fund. Indianapolis. 2004.

<sup>14</sup> D. Armitage; The Ideological Origins of the British Empire. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge 2000. p. 124.

be put down to party politics, and by the mid-Eighteenth-Century it was possible to identify one point of view on foreign policy, trade, and the running of the government with one party and the other viewpoint with the alternative party. Having crystallized during ‘the Troubles’, parties were to divide society not only upon political lines, but on confessional and even social disputes leading up to the Glorious Revolution.<sup>15</sup> With the reign of William III came the beginnings of modern Parliamentary Government by Party and Cabinet,<sup>16</sup> and in such a period of intense dynamism, much of what was to shape party disputes in the years to come was established by the men of consequence, of whom Prior was one.

Although one modern historian has stated that party government began with Edmund Burke,<sup>17</sup> it is clear from the nature of the political upheavals dealt with by what follows here, that party government, at least in its embryonic form, was shaped and formed by the men who wrote the Treaties of Ryswick, Utrecht and of Commerce in the late-Stuart period, by the friends and allies of Matthew Prior, and by Prior himself.

Into a world wracked by change stepped Matthew Prior, insignificant at his birth but the friend of sovereigns at the highest points of his life. His achievements were of supreme importance in his own time, in the decades following, and even to this day in light of the tremendous impact of the British Empire, that Empire which was founded upon the basis of the Wars of the League of Augsburg and of the Spanish Succession. Yet outside academic circles (and those mostly literary rather than historical) his name is for the most part forgotten, although some minor exceptions indicate that if one looks hard enough, and peels

---

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Scott considers this polarization that came out of the Civil Wars (or ‘Troubles’) to have developed and become legitimate in terms of the parties that emerged at this time. Scott; England’s Troubles. p. 490.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 483.

<sup>17</sup> H.C. Mansfield; Statesmanship and Party Government: A Study of Burke and Bolingbroke. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1965. p. 2.



away the patina of decades, of centuries, of neglect, some of the light of his achievement shines through. In recent years a group of scholars have created the ‘Matthew Prior Project’ to catalogue his 3000 letters;<sup>18</sup> in popular media his name also appears, an article about him can be found on Wikipedia (copied however from the 1911 Encyclopaedia Britannica)<sup>19</sup>, and as recently as July of this year he was mentioned in the Sydney Morning Herald’s Spectrum as the author of a particular poem.<sup>20</sup> It is the intention of the present author that Matthew Prior be restored to that importance he enjoyed formerly (particularly among his contemporaries), and that he be acknowledged as one of the most important men of his day, so that it might be possible to expose the light that is generated by a man of such talents and achievements even at a great distance.

---

<sup>18</sup> This is now found on the internet, although initially intended as a publication and is based at <http://digital.lib.muohio.edu/prior/> under the auspices of Miami University Libraries.

<sup>19</sup> Clearly not an academic source, nor particularly reliable, this at least indicates that there are those who consider this information to be of interest. The particular article can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew\\_Prior](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_Prior)

<sup>20</sup> See ‘Big Questions’. Spectrum. S.M.H. 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, 2006.

Chapter I  
*The Coming of the Dutchman: Prior's Diplomatic Apprenticeship*

Matthew Prior's entry into politics and diplomacy happened to coincide with the reign of William III, and it was largely due to this fact that he was able to reach such heights, and that so quickly. Between his introduction to the court in 1690, through to the King's death in 1701, Prior served in a wide variety of functions, all of interest to the present work in light of the contacts and experience gained, which became useful in his later work.

Furthermore it is evident from much of the source material of the period that he was already growing in importance, as is borne out by the opinions of his superiors and by the important commissions given him. None of this would have been possible without King William, for unlike his sister-in-law, Queen Anne, who was later to be very uncomfortable with Prior's low birth and high position, he saw birth as no obstacle to Prior's rise or to his diplomatic usefulness, and thus allowed Prior to advance further by his own merits than he ever could have under another sovereign of the same period. Here also his contacts were useful, because his powerful friends could request positions for him, and the impression left by Mr. Prior on others with whom he came into contact resulted in resounding praise from all concerned, English, French, and Dutch. The present chapter will deal with his 'apprenticeship' in diplomacy, an apprenticeship that was to be of great importance later when he undertook the tasks of his superiors, by that time as the man in charge, at the court of Louis XIV and at Utrecht from 1710 to 1713.

Prior's career had begun (as mentioned in the Introduction, above) through the influence of the Earl of Dorset, who presented him to the court of William and Mary and secured his appointment as a secretary to their Majesties at the Congress of the Allies at

The Hague in 1691.<sup>1</sup> He subsequently held various diplomatic posts in the Dutch Republic, where again he picked up much of the business of statecraft, and was also involved in the Treaty of Ryswick as a secretary, and as translator.<sup>2</sup> Once the peace treaty had brought an end to the War of the League of Augsburg, Prior was sent to France as secretary to the embassy under the Earl of Portland, and subsequently the Earl of Jersey.<sup>3</sup> Although his power in all of these areas is questionable (he is here clearly a civil servant rather than a minister), this was the preparation for great works in later years, and could well have been more than can ever be known, due to the rather secretive nature of many of the negotiations in which he was involved.

Both of those peers mentioned above, the Earls of Portland and of Jersey, were to have some impact on Prior's later life, and it is from the early period of that life that their close working relationships and friendships with the humble Mr. Prior can be charted. This is, after all, the time during which Prior made the diplomatic and political contacts that were to be of such use to him personally, and to his country, in years to come. At The Hague in 1691 he was confronted with an impressive array of personalities, Envoys, Earls, Dukes, Generals, even Sovereigns, from the Empire, England, and the Dutch Republic.<sup>4</sup> In succeeding years he was to make even more contacts among the Dutch ministers during his posting to The Hague, and by the Treaty of Ryswick he was being presented to the French

---

<sup>1</sup> Some Memoirs of the Life and Publick Employments of Matthew Prior, Esq; with A Copy of his Last Will and Testament. Drawn up by Himself in the Year MDCCXXI. E. Curll. London. 1722. (Hereafter known as Prior; Memoirs.) p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> The HISTORY of His Own Time. Compiled from the ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS Of His late EXCELLENCY MATTHEW PRIOR Esq; Revised and Signed by Himself, and Copied fair for the Press by Mr. ADRIAN DRIFT, His Executor. Printed for the Editor. London. 1740. p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Prior; Memoirs. p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> For a list of those present see Prior; History of His Own Time. pp. 6-10.

ambassadors by Lord Pembroke.<sup>5</sup> Here again he met and encountered more important men, this time those representing both the Allies *and* their opponents.<sup>6</sup> In his ensuing posting to France he was again to meet a great many useful people, and was to establish a close friendship with the Marquis de Torcy, later Louis' Secretary of State.<sup>7</sup> Of such value were these friendships and acquaintances that in 1710 when he arrived in France to present the preliminaries for the Treaty of Utrecht he was already known to all of the French ministers, and his visit was well received by all of those of importance at Versailles. Even during his first period in Paris (1697-99) he was something of a powerbroker in the French court because of his network of friends, making arrangements for the Earl of Manchester when he arrived there: "I can now acquaint your Lordship, that I arrived here the 5<sup>th</sup>, and the next Day I sent a Compliment to Monsieur *Saintot*, who immediately waited on me, and gave me to understand, that Monsieur *de Torcy* was expected in Town. Mr. PRIOR writ to him, and he appointed the Afternoon to see me."<sup>8</sup> Although undoubtedly within the purview of a secretary, Prior here was not making a simple appointment, but making an appointment with the most powerful man in France next to the King himself. Manchester's own letters reveal the great capacity of Prior to achieve such feats and his standing in the French court that allowed him to set up meetings and speak to important men in that place at a moment's notice, however, that will be dealt with at greater length below.

By this stage Mr. Prior had become used to the nature of diplomatic manoeuvre, had served out most of his apprenticeship, and was almost ready to go home. When great men

---

<sup>5</sup> 'Journal &c., Memoirs, &c., Relating to the Treaty of Ryswick.' in Historical Manuscripts Commission. (Hereafter H.M.C.) Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquis of Bath, preserved at Longleat, Wiltshire. Volume III (Prior Papers). His Majesty's Stationery Office. (Hereafter H.M.S.O.) Hereford. 1908. (Hereafter known as Bath MSS. III.) p. 537.

<sup>6</sup> For a list of those present see Prior; History of His Own Time. pp. 25-30.

<sup>7</sup> L.E. Merians; Matthew Prior: A Biographical Study. University of Maryland. Ph.D. 1983. Unpublished. Sourced from University Microfilms International. Ann Arbor. p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> (Manchester) To the Earl of JERSEY. Paris, Aug. 8. 1699. N.S. in Prior; History of His Own Time. p. 105.

such as Manchester were posted to foreign courts it was his task to instruct and support them, to be the man in the know for an appointee who might be on his first diplomatic assignment or be unfamiliar with the local situation. After his 'baptism of fire' at the Congress of The Hague in 1691 Prior had been brought into diplomacy in such a way that his natural talents could be of use, and in a way that demonstrated and made use of his considerable importance and individual capabilities. In 1693 he served the better part of a year without a superior, acting effectively as Minister to England's most important ally and learning his trade from the best, including the Dutch Grand-Pensioner Heinsius.<sup>9</sup> Such a position was allowed him by the King himself, after Lord Dursley was recalled, a vote of great confidence from a sovereign who admired Mr. Prior's capabilities, desiring "That there may be somebody at the Hague to do what is necessary in the mean time, his Majesty thinks fit that Mr. Prior, my Lord Dursley's secretary, who has been always very careful in that station, may be continued as the English Secretary,".<sup>10</sup>

Prior's position was to be further strengthened when a few years later he was appointed Secretary to the Ambassadors at the Peace of Ryswick, where, according to the editor of his memoirs, "many Memorials relating to that Treaty were drawn up by Him."<sup>11</sup> Certainly, in his letters to the Secretary of State of the period he seems to have had something to do with the actual wording of the Treaty.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, he seems to have become used to the making of treaties upon old lines and to the importance of the wider colonial world to such negotiations: "The exception of the seventh article, *iis solummodo*

---

<sup>9</sup> C.K. Eves; Matthew Prior: Poet and Diplomatist. Columbia University Press. New York. 1939. p. 56.

<sup>10</sup> Sec. Blathwayt to Shrewsbury. 1694, June 4-14, St. Hertogendale, or Valdue. in H.M.C. Report on the Manuscripts of the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, K.G., K.T., preserved at Montagu House, Whitehall. Volume II. Part 1. H.M.S.O. London. 1903. (Hereafter known as Buccleuch MSS. II. 1.) pp. 76-77.

<sup>11</sup> Prior; Memoirs. p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Mr. Prior to Shrewsbury. [16]96, Sept. 15-25, Hag[ue]. in H.M.C. Report on the Manuscripts of the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, K.G., K.T., preserved at Montagu House, Whitehall. Volume II. Part 2. H.M.S.O. London. 1903. (Hereafter known as Buccleuch MSS. II. 2.) p. 403.

*locis*, regards some forts in Hudson's Bay, which the French took from us in time of peace, and which we retook since the beginning of this war, and are at present possessors of; the rest is almost naturally a treaty of peace along the foot of that of '67 with France".<sup>13</sup> This statement is of interest insofar as, at the time of the Treaty of Utrecht, the propositions Prior presented borrowed heavily from those of Ryswick, and that in these negotiations he was to deal personally, and at great length, with the question of the final ownership of Hudson's Bay, and was to eventually secure it for Britain.<sup>14</sup> Aside from the terms of the treaty and those other parts of the secretary's duties, Prior was used in a very important capacity, that of translating documents, and in the end the treaty itself, into both French and Latin,<sup>15</sup> a great indication of his skill in those two languages, a talent that was to be of much importance in light of his being sent as the sole negotiator to the court of France at the end of the next war. Prior's ability in translation was also to be of use immediately after Ryswick, when he was sent to France with the Earl of Portland, and whilst he remained there through the change of three ministers. By all accounts this allowed for his involvement in the two Partition Treaties; designed to prevent the crowns of France and Spain from ever being united, although the secrecy of these negotiations leave the historian much in the dark as to anyone's actual role, although "it is probable from the Office he was in, that some of the Management of it must have lain upon him,"<sup>16</sup>

Certainly, at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession when Prior was again negotiating on the subject of preventing the union of the crowns, the contents of those

---

<sup>13</sup> Matthew Prior to Lord Lexington. 1697, July 12. [N.S.] Hague. in Bath MSS. III. p. 135.

<sup>14</sup> See his own record of principle articles concerning Britain at Ryswick in Prior; History of His Own Time. p. 34.

<sup>15</sup> Merians; Matthew Prior. p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Prior; History of His Own Time. pp. 42-43.

treaties must have informed his thinking, and certainly that of his masters in Whitehall.<sup>17</sup> Further corroboration of Prior's role in these treaties comes from his own letter to his superior in the negotiations, in relation to a private conference with King William: "I first read to his Majesty what your Lordship said to the King of *France*, and what the King answered thereupon; and then I explained to his Majesty the Substance of the whole that had pass'd during my being in *France*. His Majesty is satisfied with every Step your Excellency made; and, in one Word, we did as we ought to do."<sup>18</sup> The final phrase of this passage, citing "we" as the active parties gives some idea of Prior's involvement in these actions; and even though, when the supposed authors of the Treaty were impeached by Parliament, he voted against his friends and masters, he seems still to have had some considerable part to play in the last great diplomatic achievement of his apprenticeship period.

Prior's involvement is further borne out by the opinions and suggestions of his contemporaries, right up to the King himself, who wrote constantly of the importance of Mr. Prior and of his skill and usefulness in diplomatic work. After the Congress at Ryswick the King named Prior as a Gentleman of the Bedchamber,<sup>19</sup> and when Dursley left the Hague in late 1692 it was on the King's suggestion that he be appointed Secretary.<sup>20</sup> The King was also not the only one to take an interest in Prior and to make efforts to elevate him; the Duke of Shrewsbury wrote the following to him as regards the negotiations for the Treaty of Ryswick: "I have your letter of the 4<sup>th</sup>, n.s., and shall by this post desire Mr. Blaithwayt to lay before his Majesty your pretension to be Secretary of the Embassy, in

---

<sup>17</sup> See articles of the First and Second Partition Treaties in Prior; *History of His Own Time*. pp. 52-53 and 57-58 respectively.

<sup>18</sup> (Prior) To the Earl of MANCHESTER. Lond. Nov. 3/13. 1699. in *Ibid.* p. 128.

<sup>19</sup> F. Bickley; *The Life of Matthew Prior*. Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons Ltd. London. 1914. p. 33.

<sup>20</sup> Eves; *Matthew Prior*. p. 56.

case of a Treaty of Peace; and shall add my opinion of the justice of your request, and hope the King upon this occasion will give a proof of his confidence and kindness to one who, having served long and faithfully, is so well qualified for this employment.”<sup>21</sup> The previous is only one of the letters indicating Prior’s importance at home and abroad and the opinion of his contemporaries concerning his diplomatic gifts, opinions to be justified at this time and in his later negotiations with the French, on two separate occasions. In the mean-time, Mr. Prior actually received letters from his superiors, including the Duke of Shrewsbury and Sir William Trumbull (the Secretaries of State), asking him to address personal letters to them, that they might be informed of international affairs by the best correspondent available.<sup>22</sup> Such an opinion of Prior even transferred itself to France, where King Louis gave repeated praise of his abilities, and the capabilities of Mr. Prior were made clear when, during the transacting of the Partition Treaty he journeyed from King Louis to King William and back again as a messenger of the terms of that Treaty.<sup>23</sup>

These capabilities of course had excellent applications in France during Prior’s two periods there (1697-99 and 1712-14 - of the latter more follows in Chapters II and III), as Prior became known at the French court as the man to deal with as far as England/Britain was concerned. The greatest testimonies to these abilities came from the Earl of Manchester, who on arriving in 1699 put himself into Prior’s hands, writing to the latter’s patron, the Earl of Jersey, that, “with the Help of Mr. PRIOR all Things are made easy.”<sup>24</sup> and in another letter to the same noble gentleman: “I am apt to think this Occasion will make Monsieur *de Tallard* take care how he behaves himself; for he was not very easy

---

<sup>21</sup> Shrewsbury to Mr. Prior. 1696, Sept. 1, Whitehall. in Buccleuch MSS. II. 1, p. 397.

<sup>22</sup> James Vernon (for Shrewsbury) to Matthew Prior. 1694, June 12[-22]. Whitehall. in Bath MSS. III. p. 24. and Sir William Trumbull to Matthew Prior. 1696, May 15[-25]. Whitehall. in Bath MSS. III. p. 78.

<sup>23</sup> Merians; Matthew Prior. p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> (Manchester) To the Earl of JERSEY. Paris, Aug. 8. 1699. N.S. in Prior; History of His Own Time. p. 106.



when he found Mr. PRIOR was come, and that I was to have an Audience.”<sup>25</sup> Prior’s own contacts and importance as indicated here were doubtless of use again when Prior himself was the chief negotiator at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession.

Another aspect of the Secretary’s importance in contemporary affairs has been alluded to above, and that is his value as a messenger, reporter, and it can be said, spy. As early as 1694 he was passing on a request of the Dutch Pensioner and Secretaries of the Admiralties that he be informed about English ship movements so that he could channel that information to England’s closest allies,<sup>26</sup> and the same year it was he who informed Heinsius of Queen Mary’s death, having “waited on the Pensioner (as in particular from Your Grace) with the sad relation, till the notification of it comes.”<sup>27</sup> Of course these close contacts with the most powerful men from both the Dutch Republic and France made him well aware of the current manifestations of the rivalry of the three powers. Such experience, and his proximity to the negotiations for peace in 1697, meant that he was able to inform the Earl of Dorset of the developments towards a peace in January of that year,<sup>28</sup> and to pass on a copy of the peace to William Blathwayt in June.<sup>29</sup>

Not only was Mr. Prior passing on reports of diplomatic developments to his friends and correspondents in the government, but it was he who kept that government informed throughout his residence in France of the actions and plots of the Stuart court-in-exile at St. Germain, in particular throughout 1698.<sup>30</sup> For this purpose (and to keep an eye on the French) he employed any number of spies and informants to watch the Jacobite court, who

---

<sup>25</sup> (Manchester) To the Earl of JERSEY. Paris, Nov. 17, 1699. in Prior; History of His Own Time. p. 135.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew Prior to the Duke of Shrewsbury. 1694, July 9. [N.S.] Hague. in Bath MSS. III. pp. 27-28.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew Prior to the Duke of Shrewsbury. 169[4 -]5, Jan. 4-14. Hague. in *Ibid.* p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew Prior to the [Earl of Dorset] Lord Chamberlain. 169[6-]7, Jan. 8. [N.S.] Hague. in *Ibid.* p. 101.

<sup>29</sup> Matthew Prior to William Blathwayt. 1697, June 29. [N.S.] Hague. in *Ibid.* pp. 130-31.

<sup>30</sup> Prior’s letters home throughout 1698 report on Jacobite activity in France. See *Ibid.*

reported back to their spymaster, in contact with all of the most powerful men back in England.<sup>31</sup> Even more important than this, his networks of informers and his own knowledge kept him well ahead of much of Europe and of his country's residents in many places. In 1699 it was Prior who informed the ministry that the heir to the Spanish throne, the Prince of Bavaria, was dead and that the Partition Treaty that he had helped to make was now useless.<sup>32</sup> In that Treaty he was also in many ways a messenger, for it was he who was capable of indicating to his masters the substance of a work in which he had been so heavily involved, in keeping with "his Majesty's Desire that you discourse the Business of the Partition Treaty with Mr. PRIOR, who has already Knowledge of it;".<sup>33</sup> This is the 'minor' diplomat who had begun his career as a humble secretary; at this stage he was the messenger of kings to their noble ministers, and was engaged in the most high-security negotiations of his time.

Similar negotiations were to occur again in the life of Matthew Prior, but it was his early apprenticeship, more than any other factor, which led to his appointment in future events of tremendous significance. It is the aim of the present dissertation to discuss those later events in light of Prior's supreme impact upon them, but it is clear that they were very soundly based upon his years in the Netherlands and France, on the connections he had in those areas, on his evident skills (known to all of the important men of England, it would seem), and on his knowledge of the events of his time. When later he was to return to the French court to organize the two treaties that broke the Anglo-Dutch Alliance and created a new Anglo-French one, he was sent because he was the best, because he knew the game,

---

<sup>31</sup> L.G.W. Legg; Matthew Prior: A Study of His Public Career and Correspondence. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1921. p. 76.

<sup>32</sup> Bickley; Matthew Prior. p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> (Jersey) To the Earl of MANCHESTER. Whitehall, Oct. 23. 1699. O.S. in Prior; History of His Own Time. p. 125.

and because he was so well connected. These elements were entirely due to the opportunities granted to him by his patrons, and most particularly by King William, so that the man of humble origins could eventually become the equal of aristocrats and the negotiator with Kings, and would always remember as the greatest the King who had made him what he was, and what he was going to be.

## Chapter II

### *'Mat's Peace', the betrayal of the Dutch, and the French friendship*

Having returned to England in 1699 at the end of his period in France and stood for Parliament, Prior was to be out for a long time of the diplomatic service that had consumed his life for the past seven years. He served for much of this period on the Board of Trade, but was dismissed from the position by the Whigs in 1706. Therefore, when in 1710 he was called back into the world of diplomacy he was coming from a period of relative quietude in his public life, if not so in terms of his poetic production. That being said, he was still judged to be the best man for the job, and that is why he was brought into the negotiations being organized in secret by the new Tory ministry that had finally ousted the Whigs. In connection with the discussions of peace it was he who suggested the initial carrier of the message, the Abbé Gaultier, and it was he who went to France in 1711 to deliver and discuss the British propositions for peace. Subsequently, although not one of the ambassadors at Utrecht, he was to have much to do with the making of the Treaty itself, and was to spend another period in France (1712-14) as an ambassador and negotiator of the new peace and of the Anglo-French friendship. The experience and contacts gained in his earlier years were the reasons for these positions, thus the events detailed in the previous chapter of the present work served as the foundation of Prior's contribution to the Treaty of Utrecht, a contribution that has been minimized, or even ignored, in recent historical writing. Aside from the Treaty of Commerce that he negotiated at the same time (which will be the subject of the next chapter), he more than anyone else was the concrete manifestation of the change in British foreign policy brought about by the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, he was the symbol of the break with the Dutch and of the new

friendship with the French, something that he personally seems to have favoured. It is not the intention of this chapter to outline in its minutiae the Treaty of Utrecht, or to debate its importance, certainly the latter is well-established, but rather to deal with Prior's immense contribution to it, and to the tremendous about-turn in relations with the other two European powers brought about by the actions of Queen Anne's last Tory government.

The alteration to the diplomatic situation occasioned by the Peace was hardly one that could be avoided, the war had dragged on for many years at great cost in lives, materiel, and money, and aside from an invasion of France and the capture of Paris, could not conceivably bring the French to any worse a position than that which they at this time 'enjoyed'. The new government in Britain had no option but to initiate talks for a peaceful settlement that would secure the greatest concessions for their own country.<sup>1</sup> Although the government's was not a popular view, it was that of Prior's secretary and the commentator of History of His Own Time, and apparently of Prior himself: "But if we shall make it appear, that far from being improper at that Time, a peace was long before highly necessary, and might have been made with the greatest Advantage to the Allies, it will complete Mr. PRIOR's Vindication of the Measures then taken,".<sup>2</sup> However, this was not the view of the Dutch, and the betrayal of their war aims and the willingness of the British to leave the grandson of Louis XIV on the throne of Spain (and thus risk the unification of the crowns, the purpose of the war in the first place being to prevent such an occurrence) was seen,

---

<sup>1</sup> G.N. Clark; The Later Stuarts, 1660-1714. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 1944. (1934.) p. 219. This view has been shared by most modern historians in relation to Utrecht, and the Treaty itself is generally assumed to have gained the most for Britain and at the least cost. See also Lord G. Elton; Imperial Commonwealth. Collins. London. 1945. and more recently many of the articles contained in P.J. Marshall (Ed.); The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume II. The Eighteenth Century. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2001. (1998.)

<sup>2</sup> The HISTORY of His Own Time. Compiled from the ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS Of His late EXCELLENCY MATTHEW PRIOR Esq; Revised and Signed by Himself, and Copied fair for the Press by Mr. ADRIAN DRIFT, His Executor. Printed for the Editor. London. 1740. p. 257.

rightly, as a betrayal of the Grand Alliance. The Dutch of course had no option but to accept the British peace, their survival in the war and their ability to continue it was based upon British assistance, but they were by no means happy with its conclusion.<sup>3</sup> The Dutch and French had been engaged in negotiations for a peace in 1709, however these had fallen apart and Louis had turned hopefully to Britain for the desired respite. Although there were letters sent to Torcy by the Dutch after Franco-British negotiations had begun (they were shown to Prior by Torcy when he was in France),<sup>4</sup> there was no real change after Louis' decision to side with Britain in making peace without the involvement of other nations.

Here then Mr. Prior became necessary and was brought into the public life of his nation once again (although in secrecy). The first communication between Britain and France was established in 1710 by the Abbé Gaultier, who was chaplain to the French prisoners of war held in Britain, and who was recommended for the task by Prior due to an old association developed in earlier transactions between the two nations.<sup>5</sup> In England much of the discussion of these secretive events actually took place in the private home of Prior, in Duke Street, between Harley, St. John, Prior, and other members of the Cabinet, as well as the French emissaries. After Prior had been to France with Gaultier, he returned with another Frenchman, Monsieur Mesnager, who was thereafter also included in these meetings, along with Gaultier, and it was here that much of the work of making the treaty was done, as on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September, when: "The Lords of the Committee of Council met this Morning at the *Cockpit*, and directed the Earl of *Dartmouth* and myself to confer with Mons. *Mesnager*. We saw him accordingly this Evening at Mr. PRIOR's House, where my

---

<sup>3</sup> Clark; The Later Stuarts. p. 224.

<sup>4</sup> C.K. Eves; Matthew Prior: Poet and Diplomatist. Columbia University Press. New York. 1939. p. 240.

<sup>5</sup> F. Bickley; The Life of Matthew Prior. Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons Ltd. London. 1914. pp. 163-64.

Lord Treasurer (Harley) and my Lord Chamberlain were likewise present.”<sup>6</sup> No records of these meetings exist, but they certainly seem to have involved Prior quite heavily (they were in his house, after all); whatever negotiations took place in Britain did so here, those in France also being almost the sole responsibility of Prior.

With the sending of the initial British propositions it became a matter of importance that they be carried by an Englishman, rather than a Frenchman, and so Prior was sent off to France with the preliminaries, in part because he could be trusted on party lines, in part because of his superior skills in French, in part because he actually believed in peace, and in the main because he was used to these sorts of negotiations and was connected to members of the French court.<sup>7</sup> According to the Marquis de Torcy, in viewing the appointment from the other side: “They proposed Prior, who was already known in France, where he had lived some years, as secretary of the embassy to the earls of Portland and Jersey...but his chief merit, in the present conjuncture, was a sincere desire of peace. Yet they furnished him with very scanty means of bringing it about;”<sup>8</sup> The last indicates that despite his usefulness, Prior was (at least in the opinion of Torcy) not given enough powers to negotiate, or rather to offer alternative, less damaging propositions to France. He says the same in a letter to Bolingbroke of the same period,<sup>9</sup> but it is clear, that even if Prior did not actually write these preliminaries and did not greatly alter them, it was he who explained

---

<sup>6</sup> (St. John to the Queen. London. 20<sup>th</sup> Sept, 1711.) in Prior; History of His Own Time. p. 349.

<sup>7</sup> L.G.W. Legg; Matthew Prior: A Study of His Public Career and Correspondence. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1921. p. 149.

<sup>8</sup> MEMOIRS of the Marquis of TORCY, Secretary of State to LEWIS XIV. Containing the History of the Negotiations from the Treaty of RYSWICK to the Peace of UTRECHT. Translated from the FRENCH. P.Vaillant. London. 1757. (Hereafter known as Torcy Memoirs.) Volume II. p. 127.

<sup>9</sup> From the Marquis de Torcy. (Page 287.) Fontainebleau, August 3d, 1711. in Letters and Correspondence, Public and Private, of the Right Honourable Henry St. John, Lord Visc. Bolingbroke; During the time he was Secretary of State to Queen Anne; with state papers, explanatory notes, and a translation of the foreign letters &c. By Gilbert Parke. G.G. and J. Robinson. London 1798. (Hereafter known as Bolingbroke Letters.) Volume I. p. 495.

them to Torcy, and persuaded both he and King Louis to take them up, basically as written. Once Prior had arrived at the French court the two envoys discussed every point of the treaty alone, and that frequently under cover of darkness, away from all others, given the level of secrecy required,<sup>10</sup> the two old friends (for friends they were) managed to bring their countries into line, and later on, into an amiable relationship: I said we knew the state of the French nation very well, and we had a great deal of reason to be acquainted with that of our neighbour the Dutch, that I would not question but that the answer I should in a day or two receive from him would be such as a peace might be built upon.”<sup>11</sup>

Some of the propositions from Torcy were included in the British demands,<sup>12</sup> but for the most part these went beyond those offered by France, and were, instead of being general terms, entirely concerned with private benefits for Britain, and were thus incredibly sensitive.<sup>13</sup> These points were the most important documents carried by Prior at the time, along with his authority from the Queen,<sup>14</sup> and in some ways were hardly surprising. Some required simple and likely acceptances, dealing on the one hand with the security of trade,<sup>15</sup> and on the other with the recognition of Queen Anne’s title to the throne, rather than that of her half-brother.<sup>16</sup> More problematic were the claims “That *Gibraltar* and *Port Mahon* should continue in the Possession they now are in.”<sup>17</sup> and “That *Dunkirk* should be

---

<sup>10</sup> See ‘Prior’s Negotiations in France. A long paper in the handwriting of Matthew Prior...’ in H.M.C. Report on the Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Portland, K.G., preserved at Welbeck Abbey. Volume V. H.M.S.O. Norwich. 1899. (Hereafter known as Portland MSS. V.) pp. 34-42.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 40.

<sup>12</sup> For the peace proposals from Torcy see Prior; History of His Own Time. pp. 39-40.

<sup>13</sup> This secrecy is one of the articles proposed “That the secret shall be inavoidably kept, till allowed to be divulged by the mutual consent of the Parties concerned.” See ‘Peace Propositions sent to *France* by Mr. Prior.’ in *Ibid.* p. 347.

<sup>14</sup> This was rather ambiguous, signed by the Queen at the top, initialed at the bottom, not countersigned and not dated, the contents being “*Mr PRIOR is fully instructed and authorized to communicate to France our Preliminary Demands, and to bring us back the Answer.*” *Ibid.* p. 347.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 346.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 346.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 346.



demolish'd.”<sup>18</sup> The first were considerable gains made to Britain, but the latter was a thorn in her side that in early 1709 Parliament had demanded be destroyed.<sup>19</sup> Somehow Prior persuaded Torcy to accept these propositions (although to be fair, the two places gained were Spanish rather than French, and the French never did demolish Dunkirk), and even the most inflammatory articles were later accepted, one of which, the securing of four treaty ports in Spanish America for Britain, caused great alarm: “PRIOR was very sensible of the shocking nature of such a proposal. He endeavoured therefore to persuade the French ministers, that the queen was very far from having any thoughts of ruining the trade of other nations to the Spanish West Indies; that all she intended, was only to obtain a few settlements, but no fortified towns, in that part of the world;”.<sup>20</sup> However, there were worse propositions from the French point of view, and yet Prior was able to secure these great concessions to Britain, although one took more discussion than the other. They were that Newfoundland should be entirely given up to Britain,<sup>21</sup> and that the slaving *Asiento*, by which the French were the only foreign nation allowed to import slaves into Spanish America, was to be transferred to Britain.<sup>22</sup> Another proposition demanded that the free trade between France and Spain should be allowed to France’s new ally,<sup>23</sup> and it was this that was to become the basis of the Treaty of Commerce in which Prior was to be so heavily involved, and which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Having persuaded the French to accept these terms as the basis for the actual treaty negotiations Prior returned to England and reported the news to his lords and masters. He

---

<sup>18</sup> Prior; *History of His Own Time*. p. 346.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 282.

<sup>20</sup> *Torcy Memoirs*. Volume II. p. 132.

<sup>21</sup> Prior; *History of His Own Time*. p. 346.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 346.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 347.

did not, however, pass unnoticed, and it is the resulting disturbance that indicates how deeply the public believed him to be involved in the making of the peace. Two works appeared in the aftermath of his discovery whilst returning from France, one was Dr. Swift's A New Journey To Paris, which described Prior's mission (although mostly through a fictional narrative) in a satirical fashion (Swift was also a Tory),<sup>24</sup> the other was Arthur Maynwaring's An Excellent New Song: Call'd Mat's Peace. The latter gave the peace its name when it was finalized, and it became generally known as Matt's Peace, resulting in much suffering for Prior. Nonetheless, its significance lies in the fact that it serves as a reminder that Prior's role in the peace was not that of a mere messenger, but of a highly important contributor:

For how can they not think our Allies will not fire,  
At privately sending that *Machiavel P---r*?  
Who richly deserved to be *whip'd* for his Pain,  
If now we must give up *Spain*?<sup>25</sup>

Whig animosity of this sort was the product of Prior's actions in being the man by whom the relationship with the Dutch was terminated and that with France begun. Naturally, in the months to follow his initial contribution to the foreign policy aims of the Tory government he was to further assist in the alliance with France during his second period in residence there, as he helped to finalize the treaty and to establish closer links between the two countries.

---

<sup>24</sup> See 'A New Journey to Paris; Together with some Secret Transactions between the French King and an English Gentleman. By the Sieur du Baudrier. Translated from the French' and Introduction in The Works of Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin, containing Additional Letters, Tracts, and Poems not hitherto published, With Notes and a Life of the Author by Sir Walter Scott. Second Ed. In Nineteen Volumes. Bickers and Son. London. 1888. Volume IV.

<sup>25</sup> 'An Excellent New SONG, call'd Mat's Peace, or the Downfall of TRADE.' In The LIFE and POSTHUMOUS WORKS of Arthur Maynwaring, Esq; containing Several Original Pieces and Translations, in Prose and Verse, never before Printed. To which are Added, Several Political Tracts written by him, before and after the Change of the Ministry. A. Bell. London. 1715. p. 330.

In the aftermath of the preliminary discussions for the Treaty of Peace, whilst the press railed against Matthew Prior, the ministry attempted to find a way to reward him for his good work. Accordingly, Robert Harley, now Earl of Oxford, asked the Queen to appoint him as one of the Ambassadors Plenipotentiaries to be sent to Utrecht to complete the making of the peace.<sup>26</sup> Prior would certainly have been perfect for the job given his knowledge of the matters to be discussed, yet the protocol of the day did not make an allowance for one of such low birth to be appointed an Ambassador. That being said, Oxford managed to persuade the Queen (one of the sticklers for protocol against whom Prior had had to struggle) that Prior's appointment would be invaluable, and a just reward for his services, and so she informed him that: "I have no objection to Mr. Prior then what I mentioned in my last, for I always thought it very wrong to send people abroad of meane extraction; but since you think Mr. Prior will be very usefull at this time, I will comply with your desire."<sup>27</sup> To convince the Queen of this fact was extraordinary, but it was not to be, for where she had been willing to bend, the Earl of Strafford, one of the other ambassadors, was firm in his refusal to serve with Prior, although it may actually be that the Earl's animosity was personally motivated, rather than socially.

When in 1710 a vacancy occurred on the Board of Trade the position was given to Prior, despite the fact that Lord Godolphin had asked it for Strafford (then Lord Raby).<sup>28</sup> Such a lucrative position would have been much sought after, and may account for the Earl's distaste for Mr. Prior and for his abilities. Nonetheless, Prior could no longer be sent

---

<sup>26</sup> L.E. Merians; Matthew Prior: A Biographical Study. University of Maryland. Ph.D. 1983. Unpublished. Sourced from University Microfilms International. Ann Arbor. p. 96.

<sup>27</sup> Queen Anne to the Earl of Oxford. [1711,] November 19. in H.M.C. Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquis of Bath, preserved at Longleat, Wiltshire. Volume I. H.M.S.O. London. 1904. (Hereafter known as Bath MSS. I.) p. 217.

<sup>28</sup> Letter 1616. Godolphin to Marlborough. [14 July, 1710] Source: Blenheim MSS. in H.L. Snyder (Ed.); The Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence. Oxford University Press. London. 1975. Volume III. p. 1568.

to Utrecht, so he went to France in the company of St. John (now Viscount Bolingbroke: “Aug. 2/13 (1712) Saturday, Lord Bolingbroke, Mr. Gaultier, Monsr Hare and I, sett out from London, arrived Wednesday following at Paris.”<sup>29</sup> Prior was to be left in Paris after Bolingbroke returned home, but in what exact capacity is not certain, he was effectively the ambassador there, without the official title, and was, according to two notes in Bolingbroke’s letters (published 1798), Resident, or Chargé d’Affaires, or Plenipotentiary.<sup>30</sup> During almost two years following this date he remained in France, although for a brief space the Duke of Shrewsbury was officially appointed as Ambassador. When Shrewsbury was called home he repeatedly asked for an official position for Prior in letters to Oxford and indicated his faith in the diplomat’s capacity and sway at the French court.<sup>31</sup> However, Prior would be called home after the death of Queen Anne to be confined for almost a year for his peace-making actions in France by the new government.<sup>32</sup> Between his arrival in France with Bolingbroke and his departure to answer treason charges at home he was the most important Englishman in France, and was essential to the short-lived alliance of that period.

Much of Prior’s importance was still connected with organizing and settling the Treaty of Utrecht ‘behind the scenes’ as it were, as the actual treaty discussions continued in Utrecht. It had been hoped on both sides that Prior would be sent to Utrecht, as was indicated by the Marquis de Torcy himself: “The king’s plenipotentiaries reckoned to open themselves chiefly to Prior. If he should not be there, they asked his majesty which of the

---

<sup>29</sup> ‘Appendix C. Diary and Notebooks at Longleat.’ in Legg; Matthew Prior. p. 324.

<sup>30</sup> Notes pp. 23 and 51. in Bolingbroke Letters. Volume III.

<sup>31</sup> Bath MSS. I. pp. 235-38.

<sup>32</sup> Bickley; Matthew Prior. p. 205.

two English ministers they might explain themselves to with greatest safety.”<sup>33</sup> So in the mean time the French negotiators at Utrecht would be on their own, and Prior would remain in Paris with de Torcy, capable instead of discussing the application of the Peace Treaty and of the nature of the Treaty of Commerce (Although the Treaty of Commerce is relevant to this period it will be dealt with in the next chapter, as the current chapter is concerned primarily with foreign policy). Throughout his stay in France Prior received letters from Bolingbroke with great frequency, many of which indicate the confidence in which Prior was held with regards to negotiation: “you will be instructed to make an end as to the disputes still remaining between us and France.”<sup>34</sup> In another letter less than two weeks later is one of the most famous messages from the Secretary of State to the diplomat, a message laying much of the responsibility for the Treaty under way at the feet of the good Mr. Prior, in which his friend Harry begged him to “For God’s sake, dear Matt, hide the nakedness of thy country, and give the best turn thy fertile brain will furnish thee with, to the blunders of thy countrymen, who are not much better politicians than the French are poets.”<sup>35</sup> Bolingbroke here and subsequently indicates that without Prior’s success there can be no success whatsoever; hardly an indication that the gentleman in question is a minor functionary or courtier.<sup>36</sup>

There was even more responsibility to come for Prior, and again the promise of a part in the negotiations at Utrecht in these letters, but this appointment was contingent upon the Duke of Hamilton arriving in Paris to take over the embassy.<sup>37</sup> Yet again fate intervened and Hamilton was killed in a duel; resulting in Prior’s being forced to remain. Not all the

---

<sup>33</sup> Torcy Memoirs. Volume II. p. 262.

<sup>34</sup> Bolingbroke Letters. Volume III. p. 25.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p. 64.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* p. 305.

<sup>37</sup> Lord Bolingbroke to Mr. Prior. September 10, 1712. in Swift; Works. Volume XV. p. 503.

comment was good either, with Strafford singling out Prior for blame regarding the negotiation of the peace in a letter to Oxford.<sup>38</sup> However, it seems that Strafford himself was not a popular figure amongst the senior ministers, as Bolingbroke alluded in his 1717

Letter to Sir William Windham:

A few men, some of whom had never been concerned in business of this kind before, and most of whom put their hands for a long time to it faintly and timorously, were the instruments of it. The minister who was at their head showed himself every day incapable of that attention, that method, that comprehension of different matters, which the first post in such a government requires in quiet times. He was the first spring of all our motion by his credit with the Queen, and his concurrence was necessary to everything we did by his rank in the state: and yet this man seemed to be sometimes asleep, and sometimes at play.<sup>39</sup>

This minister is clearly intended to be Strafford, and Prior is clearly one of those who Bolingbroke goes on to say “drove it forward, though they were not backed by the concurrent force of the whole administration,”<sup>40</sup>

Prior certainly did ‘drive forward’ particular areas of the negotiations, namely in relation to the demolishing of Dunkirk and to the article of Newfoundland. He was required to convince the French to demolish the former,<sup>41</sup> and was well aware of its importance if he failed,<sup>42</sup> but he seems to have spent more time on the latter, and to have had the greater success there: “Mr. Prior... was instructed to offer some expedients upon that Article, which he has done and sent them to London;”<sup>43</sup> He more than anyone seems also to have been

---

<sup>38</sup> (Strafford to Oxford.) 1713, February 4/January 24. Utrecht. in H.M.C. Report on the Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Portland, K.G., preserved at Welbeck Abbey. Volume IX. H.M.S.O. London. 1923. (Hereafter known as Portland MSS. IX.) p. 366.

<sup>39</sup> ‘A Letter to Sir William Windham: Written in the Year 1717.’ in The Works of the Late Right Honourable Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke. With The Life of Lord Bolingbroke by Dr. Goldsmith. Now enlarged by more recent information relative to his public and personal character, selected from various authorities. A New Edition, In Eight Volumes. J. Johnson; Otridge and Son; .... London. 1809. Volume I. p. 19.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> Merians; Matthew Prior. pp. 135-36.

<sup>42</sup> From Mr. Prior. Fontainbleau, October 9<sup>th</sup>, N.S. 1713. in Bolingbroke Letters. Volume IV. P. 320.

<sup>43</sup> The Duke of Shrewsbury to the Earl of Oxford. 1713, January [8-]19, N.S. Paris. in Bath MSS. I. p. 228.

very well acquainted with the details of the matter, to have been capable of discussing it with Torcy at length, and to be able to resolve it independently of the ambassadors at Utrecht: “Give me leave, my Lord, to remark, upon the head of Newfoundland, that the last offer made by the French Plenipotentiaries to ours, was, that they, the French, should fish from the Bay of Fortune round by the north of Bonavista; this was the same which the Ministers here offered to me; and from the Bay of Fortune they receded to Cap Roi: but in the proposal sent by me, their liberty begins only from Point Rich;”.<sup>44</sup> Settlement of the territorial claims of the two nations to the province of Newfoundland was one of the great sticking-points of the treaty, but it was Prior who effected it and it was Prior who was the best informed of the alternative settlements,<sup>45</sup> not the envoys at Utrecht. At one time he even presented the demand that a particular fort in the area be surrendered to British troops to Torcy, a clear statement that this was to be British territory, not French: “In the Evening Mr. PRIOR waited on Monsieur *de Torcy*, and presented to him a Memorial relating to the delivering up to Her Majesty’s Troops, upon their arrival in *Newfoundland*, the Town and Fort of *Placentia*.”<sup>46</sup> Prior the negotiator was making his presence felt, he had made his country’s claims and was going to make sure that the French honoured them. Newfoundland was a great gain in the treaty, and proved decisive in North America. The final capture of this territory and the security of Hudson’s Bay left British North America secured, and New France in the perilous position it was found in when Wolfe sailed up the St. Lawrence River in 1759.

The negotiator was as a result of these dealings justifiably considered to be of tremendous importance and was raised in the esteem of those with whom he had contact.

---

<sup>44</sup> From Mr. Prior. Paris, 8<sup>th</sup> January, N.S. 1713. in *Bolingbroke Letters*. Volume III. pp. 270-71.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p.259.

<sup>46</sup> Mr. *PRIOR*’s JOURNAL AT THE COURT OF *FRANCE*. in Prior; *History of His Own Time*. p. 392.

Even King Louis joined his praises to those of others around him, and wrote to the Queen that “I expect with Impatience the Return of Mr. PRIOR, whose Conduct is very agreeable to Me:”,<sup>47</sup> and Torcy habitually referred to Prior as ‘Matthew’ in his correspondence, a significant mark of friendship from one so elevated and possessing such power.<sup>48</sup> Prior himself was well aware of his stock with the members of the French court, and built much upon their opinion of his importance: “you know these people, and the account they will make of Matthew, as they think he has credit with Henry and Robin; but this is all with perfect submission.”<sup>49</sup> ‘With perfect submission’ it may have been, but it was true. Prior did frequently refer to his superiors Bolingbroke and Oxford (the Henry and Robin of the above) by their first names, and his correspondence with Bolingbroke is, after a certain point, consistently addressed from Harry to Matt, or Matt to Harry. With others of his own country he was considered to be of great standing, as with his ‘colleague’ of so many years, Shrewsbury, who wrote to Oxford: “I think I may congratulate your Lordship that the peace is made, in which if by good fortune I have any share, I must do Mr. Prior the justice to inform you, that I have been in so particular a manner assisted by his zeal, diligence and ability that I hope he will be immediately encouraged and countenanced by some mark of your Lordship’s favour.”<sup>50</sup>

It is even suggested in the History of His Own Time that Prior was, even when Shrewsbury was in Paris, the man of greatest importance at that court, and that Shrewsbury was present simply to add aristocratic credence to that mission.<sup>51</sup> Even later than this, it was

---

<sup>47</sup> (Louis to Anne.) Versailles, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1712. in Prior; History of His Own Time. p. 376

<sup>48</sup> From the Marquis de Torcy. (Page 272.) Versailles, December 29<sup>th</sup>, 1712. in Bolingbroke Letters. Volume III. p. 586.

<sup>49</sup> From Mr. Prior. Paris, October 6-17<sup>th</sup>, 1713. in *Ibid.* Volume IV. P. 323.

<sup>50</sup> The Duke of Shrewsbury to the Earl of Oxford. 1713, [February 26-] March 8. in Bath MSS. I. p. 230.

<sup>51</sup> Prior; History of His Own Time. pp. 364-65.



suggested that the ministry in London did not want an ambassador sent to them from France because that would require the withdrawal of Prior and his replacement with a titled ambassador, in keeping with the etiquette of diplomacy.<sup>52</sup> Finally, in his last dealings with King Louis XIV himself, Prior was again raised to the height that he perhaps deserved as the architect of the two nations' union and friendship. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of August, 1714 "Mr. PRIOR had an Audience of the King, wherein, among other Things, he announced the Death of her Majesty."<sup>53</sup> This should have been the task of an ambassador; in the absence of one it was Prior who broke the news to Louis, who foreshadowed his own recall at the end of the brief period of amity, when the King would give him, as a mark of his esteem, a miniature of himself in a setting studded with brilliant diamonds.<sup>54</sup> Throughout the brief Franco-British friendship it had been Prior who communicated the state of affairs, and just as four years before he had brought the overtures for peace, in the end he was the one to take leave of the French court before a century of wars between the two momentary allies.

Thus the Treaty of Utrecht and the Franco-British alliance owed much, their existence even, to Mr. Matthew Prior. Although it may have been possible for something akin to these events to take place without his aid, if it were not for his titanic efforts behind closed doors and in night-time meetings with the French King and his ministers they would not have come to the same point as they eventually did. There was great hope at the time for a new and peaceful period, and the Tories were ecstatic in congratulating themselves upon the peace made whilst Prior remained in Paris: "a peace is concluded, so honourable to your Majesty, and safe and advantageous to your kingdoms; by which we hope, with the

---

<sup>52</sup> Merians; Matthew Prior, p. 128.

<sup>53</sup> Mr. *PRIOR*'s JOURNAL AT THE COURT OF *FRANCE*. in Prior; History of His Own Time, p. 411.

<sup>54</sup> Eves; Matthew Prior, p. 346.

blessing of God, that your people will in a few years recover themselves after so long and expensive a war.”<sup>55</sup>

For once Britain and France were in league, and unlike the alliance of the latter part of the previous century, this one had the support of the Houses of Parliament.<sup>56</sup> So well founded was the peace that no wars consumed Britain for a generation until 1739,<sup>57</sup> and it has even been suggested that throughout the intervening period Britain and France *remained allies*.<sup>58</sup> Where since the Restoration even years of peace had seen a rise in the army as new regiments were formed, the reign of George I gave birth to only two regiments of foot, and that of his son, before the outbreak of war in 1739, to only one, the only other new formations being of cavalry to combat the 1715 Jacobite Rebellion. In the wider world Britain was ready to create her great Empire, and the Treaty of Utrecht is seen by many as the origin of that immense achievement.<sup>59</sup> In years to come the Tory approach to warfare developed towards its greatest dogma; that Britain needed only the seas and that entanglements on the Continent were nothing but trouble.<sup>60</sup> Such a policy was later formalized by Bolingbroke, Prior’s friend and master, along the lines laid down by both gentlemen at Utrecht: “Our nation inhabits an island, and is one of the principle nations of Europe; but to maintain this rank, we must take the advantages of this situation, which have been neglected by us for almost half a century: we must always remember, that we are not

---

<sup>55</sup> ‘The Queen’s Speech. 1713, April 9 – Draft of the address of thanks for the Queen’s Speech at the opening of Parliament on this day, in Swift’s handwriting,’ in Portland MSS. V. p. 276.

<sup>56</sup> Eves; Matthew Prior. p. 298.

<sup>57</sup> Clark; The Later Stuarts. p. 226.; L. James; The Rise and Fall of the British Empire. Abacus. London. 2001. (1994.)

<sup>58</sup> J. Brewer; The Sinews of Power: War, money and the English state, 1688-1783. Unwin Hyman. London. 1989. p. 173.

<sup>59</sup> J.I. Israel; ‘The Emerging Empire: The Continental Perspective, 1650-1713.’ in N. Canny (Ed.); The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume I. The Origins of Empire. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2001. (1998.) p. 444.

<sup>60</sup> D. Armitage; The Ideological Origins of the British Empire. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge 2000. p. 185.

part of the continent, but we must never forget, that we are neighbours to it.”<sup>61</sup> The foreign policy aims of the last years of Queen Anne foreshadowed this approach to Europe, and the Treaty of Utrecht was the embodiment of these ideals, securing for Britain her European bastions (Gibraltar and Port Mahon) and her colonial sureties (Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Hudson’s Bay, and St. Kitts). Whilst many see the Treaty as the product of Bolingbroke’s policy, others attribute it to Oxford,<sup>62</sup> yet very few recognize the tremendous impact of Prior upon foreign policy; it was he who made it work, it was he who implemented it and it is he whose name is left out of almost all modern histories of the negotiations, of the treaty, and of its impact. By the end of his life Prior was not even sure of what his great achievement had become, and he said of the fruits of his labours to the Earl of Oxford: “I can tell you no news in general, we build upon the peace of Utrecht, and stock job upon the credit of the South Sea, contenting ourselves by saying that both are now other things than they were.”<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> ‘Letters on the Study and Use of History.’ in Bolingbroke; Works. Volume IV. P. 149.

<sup>62</sup> L. Colley; In Defiance of Oligarchy: The Tory Party, 1714-60. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1982. p. 16.

<sup>63</sup> M[atthew] Prior to the Earl of Oxford. 1720, June 17. Westminster. in Portland MSS. V. p. 598.

### Chapter III *The Treaty of Commerce and the Empire of Trade*

Whilst in Paris as negotiator and envoy Matthew Prior served his government in another, even more extraordinary way. The Treaty of Utrecht, although enormously important, was simply another exchange of territory and of concessions at the end of a long war. The associated Treaty of Commerce, which was drawn up in its entirety by Prior (where the Treaty of Peace had been finalized by others at Utrecht), was very much ahead of its time. As a security of the peace and alliance between Britain and France it was an excellent guide, but it went so far as to establish an effective system of free-trade between the nations at a time when mercantilism was still very much the accepted system. In his enormous work, Prior built once again on his previous experience, but in so doing he built something entirely new, something based on a strong rationale of secure peace. His efforts, particularly in the removal of existing tariffs and excises and the establishment of a most-favoured nation status between the two former enemies, were extraordinary. If he was not to be at the final negotiations for the peace, he at least was the one who attempted to anchor it on commercial and trading grounds. Of course the very radical nature of the Treaty meant that there were a great many objections from those who saw no other system than mercantilism as the way to conduct effective trade, and it was these men who sunk the Treaty of Commerce by refusing to pass it through Parliament. Yet despite its ultimate failure, the significance of the Treaty is not diminished, but rather heightened by its suggestion of things to come, and by the tantalizing prospects of commercial success that can be imagined had Britain and France spent the Eighteenth-Century trading with one another and at peace rather than closing their particular trading empires and colonies to one

another and fighting long and costly wars. Even in later years when Bolingbroke and his allies in politics advocated a blue-water policy of imperial trade and commerce, they could not make anything like free-trade work for them; it was in 1712-13 that Prior brought his nation closest to this point, and it was the failure of the Tory Parliament that destroyed it.

To return once again to Prior's 'apprenticeship period' as a starting point, the foundation of his later work on the Treaty of Commerce was once again based in the days of King William and in that monarch's favour. In his role as secretary at The Hague during the peace negotiations he also encountered trading disputes between the great powers, and mention of commerce was appended to the actual Treaty (with which he was of course heavily involved, and which he translated).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore he was forced at the time to deal with the particular claims of various trading nations, in particular with those of his own country,<sup>2</sup> and of those of Scotland,<sup>3</sup> as they related to the other powers. Throughout his Dutch period and his ensuing first stay in France, Prior became acquainted not only with trading claims in the abstract, but with the colonial manifestations of these disputes and conflicts. On one front he dealt with the question of Hudson's Bay,<sup>4</sup> on another with trading rights in Western Africa, the hub of the slave trade: "They say the Isle of Goree and its dependencies was yielded to them by the Dutch at the Treaty of Nimeghen, so that they reckon it now as one of their Colonies. At the same time they tell you the King of that country is obliged by treaty to trade with them alone, exclusive of all others except the Portuguese, which destroys their pretence to a colony by owning a King of the country, and

---

<sup>1</sup> See 'Journal &c., Memoirs, &c., Relating to the Treaty of Ryswick'. in H.M.C. Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquis of Bath, preserved at Longleat, Wiltshire. Volume III (Prior Papers). H.M.S.O. Hereford. 1908. (Hereafter known as Bath MSS. III.) p. 534.

<sup>2</sup> In relation to nations as distant as Russia, as in a letter William Blathwayt to Matthew Prior. 1697, August 29. [N.S.] Dieren. in *Ibid.* p. 155.

<sup>3</sup> Treaty of Ryswick. Scotland. [1697, May.] in *Ibid.* p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> See Journal &c., Memoirs, &c., Relating to the Treaty of Ryswick. in *Ibid.* pp. 531 and 533.

grounding their right of excluding us upon a treaty made with him.”<sup>5</sup> The ‘They’ in question are the French, and the previous a perfect case of mercantilism, with one nation closing off one source of trade to her enemies despite the possibilities for common use of that market.

At the same time Prior was dealing with the several claims of various Royal African Companies in that same area, and attempting to communicate similar restrictions on the English part in the rivers of Gambia, Nunez, Serelion and other native market centres.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, he was instructed as to the Darien expedition whilst in Paris, and informed that the government was not only *not* going to support the Scottish in that enterprise, but was hoping that the settlement would be wiped out.<sup>7</sup> At the time, Mr. Prior was also discussing trade agreements with the French, and even asked for an advice from the Board of Trade so that he and his master might be better informed of the state of French commerce: “Mr. Stepney told me before my leaving England that his Board had laid a state of our trade with this kingdom before His Majesty. My Lord desires a copy of that paper may be sent to us.”<sup>8</sup>

However, it was in connection with that Board that Prior was to find his greatest experience in economic matters, for he was named a Commissioner of the Board of Trade and Plantations upon his return to England, as a reward for his service.<sup>9</sup> This body controlled every aspect of England’s colonies, of her trading companies, and of her

---

<sup>5</sup> Abraham Stanyan to Matthew Prior. 1699, Dec. 30. [N.S.] Paris. in Bath MSS. III. p. 389.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Prior to Sir William Trumbull. 1697, July 9[-19]. in *Ibid.* pp. 138-39.

<sup>7</sup> For this matter see (Prior)[To Earl of Jersey.] Paris the 5/15 July 1699. in ‘Appendix B. Letters of Matthew Prior preserved at Middleton Park. in L.G.W. Legg; Matthew Prior: A Study of His Public Career and Correspondence. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1921. pp. 299-300.; [The Earl of Jersey] to Matthew Prior. 1699, July 10[20]. Whitehall. in Bath MSS. III. p. 370.; (Prior to Jersey) Paris the 15/25 July 1699. in Appendix B. in Legg; Matthew Prior. p. 302.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Prior to James Vernon. [1697-8, circa March 16. N.S. Paris.] in Bath MSS. III. p. 200.

<sup>9</sup> L.E. Merians; Matthew Prior: A Biographical Study. University of Maryland. Ph.D. 1983. Unpublished. Sourced from University Microfilms International. Ann Arbor. p. 28.

commerce with the rest of Europe.<sup>10</sup> These were the mainstays of England's commercial prosperity, and Prior threw himself into his duties in a way that would have been highly unusual in a normal, place-seeking appointee. Very quickly he gained an interest in trade, and attributed much of its success to the king who had elevated him to his new position in his 'Carmen Seculare, For the Year 1700. To the King.':

Through various Climes, and to each distant Pole  
In happy Tides let active Commerce rowl:  
Bet BRITAIN's Ships export an Annual Fleece,  
Richer than ARGOS brought to ancient GREECE;  
Returning loaden with the shining Stores,  
Which lye profuse on either INDIA's Shores.<sup>11</sup>

The Board position was lucrative, but also time-consuming, and it dictated much of Prior's life until he was dismissed by the Whigs.<sup>12</sup> This completed his commercial and mercantile apprenticeship, and when the Tories returned to power in 1710 he was restored to his former position, named a Commissioner for the Customs, and subsequently sent to France as negotiator.<sup>13</sup>

A blue-water policy of imperial development was the aim of the Tory government, rather than continued war with France,<sup>14</sup> but there was much opposition from mercantilists and protectionists (particularly in connection with the large trading companies that possessed government-granted monopolies).<sup>15</sup> However, the power to alter the commercial

---

<sup>10</sup> C.K. Eves; *Matthew Prior: Poet and Diplomatist*. Columbia University Press. New York. 1939. p. 160.

<sup>11</sup> 'Carmen Seculare, For the Year 1700. To the King.' in Wright and Spears (Eds.); *The Literary Works of Matthew Prior*. Second Ed. Oxford University Press. London. 1971. Volume I. pp. 178-79.

<sup>12</sup> F. Bickley; *The Life of Matthew Prior*. Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons Ltd. London. 1914. p. 112.

<sup>13</sup> *Some Memoirs of the Life and Publick Employments of Matthew Prior, Esq; with A Copy of his Last Will and Testament. Drawn up by Himself in the Year MDCCXXI*. E. Curll. London. 1722. (Hereafter known as Prior; *Memoirs*.) p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Armitage; *Ideological Origins*. p. 144.

<sup>15</sup> J. Brewer; *The Sinews of Power: War, money and the English state, 1688-1783*. Unwin Hyman. London. 1989. p. 168.

life of the nation did not lie in the hands of these men, but rather of the government,<sup>16</sup> and so despite the contrary opinions advanced against the treaty, Prior and his masters went ahead with the new arrangement for the benefit of the nation: “Now the most effectual way of preventing this, (renewed war) is certainly an open and advantageous commerce between the two kingdoms. Nothing unites like interest; and when once our people have felt the sweet of carrying our trade to France, under reasonable regulations, the artifices of Whigism will have the less effect amongst them.”<sup>17</sup> The motivation here is increased prosperity and inclination towards peace rather than war (as against the ‘Whig policy’ of war on the Continent). In many cases this initiative is attributed to Bolingbroke’s desires, based on the suggestion that it was he who wished to establish free-trade.<sup>18</sup> However, in a letter that predates the initial propositions for the Treaty, it seems that Prior is the one suggesting a separate treaty to Bolingbroke: “The usual articles, therefore, of a treaty of commerce, that of the *droit d’aubaine*, that of tare, and what your Lordship sees is pretty much adjusted, may be agreed and signed at Utrecht with the treaty of peace, but in a distinct instrument, and as a treaty of commerce; and in it the specialties as to the matter of diminishing the *droits*, and regulating the tariff, must be provided for by one general clause.”<sup>19</sup>

Although the idea of an open trade seems to have been accepted amongst the highest ranking Tories as useful and beneficial, the separating out of the question of trade and the resulting increased focus on it as distinct from the Treaty of Peace, would seem to

---

<sup>16</sup> Brewer; *Sinews of Power*. p. 170

<sup>17</sup> To Mr. Prior. 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1713. in Letters and Correspondence, Public and Private, of the Right Honourable Henry St. John, Lord Visc. Bolingbroke; During the time he was Secretary of State to Queen Anne; with state papers, explanatory notes, and a translation of the foreign letters &c. By Gilbert Parke. G.G. and J. Robinson. London 1798. (Hereafter known as Bolingbroke Letters.) Volume IV. p. 153.

<sup>18</sup> W.E.H. Lecky; A History of England in the Eighteenth Century. Volume I. Longmans Green and Co. London. 1888. p. 142.

<sup>19</sup> From Mr. Prior. Versailles, December 17-28<sup>th</sup>, 1712. in Bolingbroke Letters. Volume III. p. 249.



have come from Mr. Prior whilst he was in France. In some sense he was performing a task that was greatly needed and desired at home, yet its very revolutionary nature meant that it lacked support once completed. Even as far back as 1706 the Duke of Marlborough, at the head of an increasingly Whig ministry, said that “the frute of the Spanish war, for the good of England, must be a treaty of trade,”<sup>20</sup> and there were always those who felt that the Treaty of Commerce negotiated by Prior was of advantage to Britain.<sup>21</sup> It was, however, yet another alteration of Britain’s foreign policy aims and arrangements, for it offered great gains in the Franco-British alliance and left the Dutch out in the cold.<sup>22</sup>

The task fell to Prior to organize the trade with France after years of closed ports and hostility, in part no doubt because of his own inclination towards such a separate treaty, and in part because he was the most experienced man on trade and commerce who was available to the Tory government.<sup>23</sup> Such confidence was more than demonstrated in a letter written by Bolingbroke to the Queen that said that Mr. Prior: “is the best Witness we can produce of the Sense in which the General Preliminary Engagements are entered into: Besides which, as he is the best vers’d in Matters of Trade of all you Majesty’s Servants who have been trusted in this Secret,”<sup>24</sup> So he was given sole control of the Treaty of Commerce that was to be written by the ministers of the two now friendly nations, although

---

<sup>20</sup> Letter 681. Marlborough to Godolphin. [9/20 September 1706] Source: Blenheim MSS. in H.L. Snyder (Ed.); The Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence. Oxford University Press. London. 1975. Volume II. P. 673.

<sup>21</sup> See ‘Appendix. MEMOIRS of the HARLEY FAMILY, especially of ROBERT HARLEY, first EARL of OXFORD; by EDWARD HARLEY, Auditor of the Exchequer. in H.M.C. Report on the Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Portland, K.G., preserved at Welbeck Abbey. Volume V. H.M.S.O. Norwich. 1899. (Hereafter known as Portland MSS. V.) p. 660.

<sup>22</sup> For the articles relating to the Dutch see [John Drummond to the Earl of Oxford]. 1713, July [1-]11, N.S. Utrecht. in *Ibid.* p. 301.

<sup>23</sup> Bickley; Matthew Prior. p. 183.

<sup>24</sup> (St. John to the Queen. London. 20<sup>th</sup> Sept, 1711.) in The HISTORY of His Own Time. Compiled from the ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS Of His late EXCELLENCY MATTHEW PRIOR Esq; Revised and Signed by Himself, and Copied fair for the Press by Mr. ADRIAN DRIFT, His Executor. Printed for the Editor. London. 1740. pp. 351-52.

it seems there was at least one who felt that Strafford had been responsible for its creation.<sup>25</sup> Yet if there could be any doubt of Prior's role, it must be removed by discussions of Prior with the Frenchmen involved, which address the most important points in dispute. Upon his informing King Louis of the propositions for the basis of the treaty, that most powerful of sovereigns answered him on the main points,<sup>26</sup> and referred him to his ministers to deal with any other that occurred,<sup>27</sup> after which the minister went on to negotiate with Torcy: "that as little as could might be left to Commrs to be named afterwards, I told him I would draw out the Chief heads of what we might desire, as I would receive likewise those that they might ask, and was ready when they pleased to discourse with the Ministers upon them;"<sup>28</sup>

The power of these negotiations seems to lie chiefly in the two individual representatives; Prior was not receiving, but drawing up the points to be dealt with, and he was at this stage independent of any close control, Bolingbroke had left a long time before and Shrewsbury had not yet arrived. Prior was fierce in defending and seeking to increase his country's trade in these meetings,<sup>29</sup> and his contact with others than Torcy, including the Comptroller-General of the Finances, indicates his importance as a negotiator on these matters at the court: "Monsieur des Marais (the Comptroller), told me this morning, that they were examining our articles of commerce, and in two or three days, he should be able to talk with me on that head."<sup>30</sup> When the articles were finally arranged between Prior and the great men of the French court, the King, the Marquis de Torcy, and the Comptroller-

---

<sup>25</sup> [John Drummond to the Earl of Oxford]. 1713, September [18-]29, N.S. Utrecht. in Portland MSS. V. p. 336.

<sup>26</sup> From Mr. Prior. Versailles, December 17-28<sup>th</sup>, 1712. in Bolingbroke Letters. Volume III. p. 246.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* (the same letter) p. 231.

<sup>28</sup> Appendix C. in Legg; Matthew Prior. p. 329.

<sup>29</sup> Eves; Matthew Prior. p. 243.

<sup>30</sup> From Mr. Prior. Fontainbleau, {August 29<sup>th</sup>,/September 9<sup>th</sup>,} 1712. in Bolingbroke Letters. Volume III. p. 57.

General, amongst others, he was considered by his friends in France to be of sufficient importance in these negotiations to have the last word, equal to any possessed by the ambassador or the negotiators of the peace: “THE articles, respecting the liberty, which the subjects of both nations shall have, and ought to have, to trade, &c. shall be expressed in general terms; and if, in the discussion of them, any exception is made, it shall be settled, without loss of time, either with the Duke of Shrewsbury, Mr. Prior, or, at Utrecht, with the Plenipotentiaries of France and Great Britain.”<sup>31</sup> It is in the nature of the Parliamentary system that power should be spread as thinly as possible to prevent abuses, yet it is clear from the discussions of the Treaty of Commerce that in this case, unlike in the Treaty of Utrecht, Prior had the most power and capability for decisions of his entire career.

In the individual areas of the Treaty Prior had the same influence, most particularly in the two main points of interest, both then and now, the two points that were the most radical, in terms of the foreign relations of the period, and in terms of the approach to the economic understanding of the mercantilist age. Until the actual making of the treaty, Prior was informed by Bolingbroke in the early stages that the excises in place should still be imposed,<sup>32</sup> however, it was the opinion of both sides that a virtual embargo was mutually destructive: “an *entière prohibition* being very prejudicial to both nations, but more so to England, he (Desmarais) says, than to France: and that the high duties on both sides ought to be taken off.”<sup>33</sup> Self-interest then was the motivation for one of the main articles, that all duties at that time payable on trade between the two nations (having become extremely high due to the almost continual warfare of the period) must be taken off, since “the

---

<sup>31</sup> (4) *Article proposed about the tariff of 1664, received from Monsieur de Torcy, 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1713.* in *Bolingbroke Letters*. Volume III. p. 583.

<sup>32</sup> To Mr. Prior. Whitehall, 27<sup>th</sup> August, 1712. in *Ibid.* Volume III. p. 25.

<sup>33</sup> From Mr. Prior. Versailles, December 17-28<sup>th</sup>, 1712. in *Ibid.* Volume III. p. 244.

English have increased their imposts upon French goods almost every Parliament since 1664;”<sup>34</sup> and considering that: “This, upon the whole, they propose as the basis upon which our commerce may reciprocally rest, and to which both nations should endeavour to bring it.”<sup>35</sup> It can therefore be seen that tariff reduction was the basis of the free-trade between Britain and France that lay at the heart of the Commercial Treaty, all duties were to be reduced to 1664 levels (with the exception of four specified products) and that the system of open and (fairly) unrestricted trade used by the Dutch for so long should apply between the two other great trading and imperial nations of Europe: “For this purpose, all general prohibitions against the entry of merchandise shall be annulled on both sides; and as the English, by this means, will enjoy the tariff of 1664 as the Dutch now do, we will endeavour to settle and regulate affairs of commerce as soon as the Parliament meets, so that the conditions be equal on both sides.”<sup>36</sup> Reduction of tariffs was settled by Prior as the basis of the treaty, despite Strafford’s belief that in reducing the duties of the two countries to the same level Prior was making a mistake, and that he should have demanded the French reduce their tariffs whilst Britain kept hers.<sup>37</sup> The Earl of course was not grasping the nature of the new arrangement, like so many others, but in January of 1713 Matt was able to inform Harry that once 1664 was established as the benchmark, the treaty was completed.<sup>38</sup>

A new equality of trade and excise was the result of the second major article of the Treaty negotiated by Prior, and one closely related to the article reducing tariffs. That is, the section of the Treaty that names the English as *amicissima gens* in France and effectively

---

<sup>34</sup> From Mr. Prior. Paris, January 8<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>, 1713. in Bolingbroke Letters. Volume III. p. 296.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* (the same letter) Volume III. p. 296.

<sup>36</sup> Mr. Prior’s Memorial, 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1712. in *Ibid.* Volume III. p. 575. (translation of Note p. 240.)

<sup>37</sup> (Strafford to Oxford from the Hague. 1713, January 24/13. Utrecht.) in H.M.C. Report on the Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Portland, K.G., preserved at Welbeck Abbey. Volume IX. H.M.S.O. London. 1923. (Hereafter known as Portland MSS. IX.) p. 359.

<sup>38</sup> Matt to Harry. Paris, January 12<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup>, 1713. in Bolingbroke Letters. Volume III. p. 299.

granted them what today might be called ‘most-favoured nation status’.<sup>39</sup> Such a request was in line with the prevailing image of the Franco-Dutch trading situation, and was designed to ensure the same, if not better treatment for the British from their new allies at the expense of the old, for: “they (the Dutch) rather suffer a small loss than let us have a considerable benefit, and Buys brags always of their being to be treated *amicissima gente*, and that all benefits which England may receive from France from lowering or diminishing the duty on French wine or any French product, will be also allowed to the Dutch,”<sup>40</sup> The special status of the Dutch as traders was the problem that the new condition of a special relationship was designed to redress, and Prior was convinced that what was being asked for was not new in light of the fact that the Dutch had been treated similarly in the past.<sup>41</sup> What he asked was that such favourable treatment be ‘transferred’ to the British, that they become the closest trading allies of the French, which was naturally necessary after the betrayal of the Dutch and the closing of that avenue of trade: “IT is proposed that the English, with respect to duties in France, should be treated as *amicissima gens*, and that the French should be treated in England in the same manner.”<sup>42</sup>

In consideration of a special commercial status it was even suggested by Prior that each nation should have a ‘Consul’ permanently resident in the other’s court to deal with trade, but he quickly became aware that the French were not willing to have such a figure at their court, and so a settlement was reached by which any consular role would devolve upon the normal ministers in each court.<sup>43</sup> In connection with a special status and the new amity that was made evident by the suggestion of permanent consuls, what Britain asked in

---

<sup>39</sup> See *Bolingbroke Letters*. Volume III. p. 592. (translation of Note p. 354.)

<sup>40</sup> [John Drummond to the Earl of Oxford]. 1713, April [14 -]25, N.S. Utrecht. in *Portland MSS*. V. p. 280.

<sup>41</sup> From Mr. Prior. Versailles, December 17-28<sup>th</sup>, 1712. in *Bolingbroke Letters*. Volume III. pp. 240-43.

<sup>42</sup> Mr. Prior’s Memorial, 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1712. in *Ibid*. Volume III. p. 575. (translation of Note p. 240.)

<sup>43</sup> From Mr. Prior. Paris, January 8<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>, 1713. in *Ibid*. Volume III. p. 297.

terms of more minor articles was still a system of special treatment designed only for their own country. Thus they asked to be able to import tobacco into the country despite the fact that it was already grown there,<sup>44</sup> and requested special permission regarding traders resident in France: “That the subjects of her Britannic Majesty who are now settled, or may hereafter settle in France, shall be exempt from the right d’Aubaine, and be suffered to dispose of their effects by will, gift, or otherwise.”<sup>45</sup> In all of this Prior was making quite exorbitant demands upon a country with which his own had been at war for twenty-five years, but it seems that he was in contact with the right people and was trusted by the French ministers, to whom it must have been clear that a trading alliance between the two most powerful countries in both Europe and the wider world would be of great mutual benefit in the long-run, once their inhabitants had been made aware of the benefits of free-trade.

However, as with the Treaty of Utrecht, there were objections to the Treaty of Commerce at home in Britain and all of Prior’s work was eventually destroyed when the Treaty itself was rejected by the House of Commons. Prior himself was aware of the opposition he was up against with his greatest work, and realised that the removal of tariffs and the *amicissima gens* arrangement was: “a bargain, which, in my poor sense, seems to be one of the best that, for some years past, has been made for the universal good of England, however disadvantageous it will prove to those, who upon the ’Change are called topping merchants, and who have made themselves such by a downright monopoly of the trade (which should be national) into their own hands.”<sup>46</sup> Naturally, free-trade was of no

---

<sup>44</sup> Mr. Prior’s Memorial, 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1712. in Bolingbroke Letters. Volume III. p. 577. (translation of Note p. 240.)

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* (the same document) Volume III. p. 577. (translation of Note p. 240.)

<sup>46</sup> From Mr. Prior. Paris, February 9<sup>th</sup>, N.S. 1714. in Bolingbroke Letters. Volume IV. pp. 465-66.

interest to those with shares in the monopolistic trading companies, and as those men made up, or controlled, much of the Commons, so it was next to impossible to pass such a revolutionary Treaty as that which had been made at great effort by Prior whilst in France<sup>47</sup>. At the same time, Daniel Defoe, having counselled Oxford to delay the attempted passage of the bill to preserve it in tact in the face of any opposition, commented that those who had opposed the Treaty had done so as a party matter rather than a question of broad economics.<sup>48</sup> He went on to say in the same letter: “That the Dutch are against our trade with France is itself a reason why we ought to open that trade and more need not be said to it. That the Portugal merchants are against it is plainly opposing a private interest to a public good.”<sup>49</sup> Defoe realized that the sectional interests of many men would affect their response to the new Treaty, and that the former allies of Britain would be predictably annoyed, but he nonetheless hoped for a respite that would allow such an important bill to pass. On a party question such as this, much would also have been made of the fact that the Peace and associated Treaty were the products of a Tory ministry, and that the negotiator of both of these important documents was a Tory as well. As a result: “The Whigs, who have been beat off from all their other attacks, seem to fix themselves on the treaty of commerce, as their last hold, and endeavour to raise a ferment among the people, by scanning, straining, and misrepresenting every article, nay, every syllable in it; and propagating with wonderful industry, that all trade whatever with France is prejudicial to Britain.”<sup>50</sup> Once again the career of Prior was to suffer a great blow as the Whigs inflicted their revenge

---

<sup>47</sup> See J.M. Price; ‘The Imperial Economy, 1700-1776.’ in P.J. Marshall (Ed.); The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume II. The Eighteenth Century. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2001. (1998). pp. 78-81.

<sup>48</sup> [Daniel De Foe to the Earl of Oxford]. [1713, October 22. *Received.*] in Portland MSS. V. pp. 351-52.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* (the same letter) p. 352.

<sup>50</sup> To Mr. Prior. 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1713. in Bolingbroke Letters. Volume IV. pp. 152-53.

aimed at he and his party on his Treaty of Commerce, that *magnum opus* upon which he had worked so hard for so long.

So Prior's personal contribution towards a free-trading imperial alliance was foiled by party prejudice and commercial interest groups, and it fell to his friend Bolingbroke to resuscitate these claims thirty years later as part of his version of Tory policy: "By trade and commerce we grew a rich and powerful nation, and by their decay we are growing poor and impotent. As trade and commerce enrich, so they fortify our country. The sea is our barrier, ships are our fortresses, and the mariners, that trade and commerce alone can furnish, are the garrisons to defend them."<sup>51</sup> In the period between the making of the Treaty of Commerce and Bolingbroke's Idea of a Patriot King, not only did free-trade fail to materialize, but further duties were laid by successive Whig governments.<sup>52</sup> Instead of enjoying the great commercial alliance that had been planned, the French and British ended up in competition for every market, every colonial port, and every commodity, where otherwise they may have grown even more as trading nations.<sup>53</sup> Nor was there any other alliance of use, for the offended Dutch never reunited with Britain and in the period between 1720 and 1740 their own economy collapsed.<sup>54</sup> Prior's concern for trade in foreign policy only resurfaced in 1739, when Bolingbroke wrote The Idea of a Patriot King,

---

<sup>51</sup> (Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke); LETTERS, on the Spirit of PATRIOTISM: on the Idea of a PATRIOT KING: and On the STATE of PARTIES, At the Accession of King GEORGE the First. A. Millar. London. 1749. (Hereafter known as Bolingbroke; Patriot King.) pp. 184-85.

<sup>52</sup> See *Ibid.* pp. 189-90. and Colley; In Defiance of Oligarchy. p. 214.

<sup>53</sup> G.N. Clark; The Later Stuarts, 1660-1714. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 1944. (1934). p. 228.

<sup>54</sup> J.I. Israel; The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806. Clarendon Press. Oxford. 1995. pp. 998-1005. On this and other matters relating to the Dutch Republic see also those documents contained in H.H. Rowen (Ed.); The Low Countries in Early Modern Times. Macmillan. London. 1972.



advocating such a system, and when Britain went to war with Spain over commercial and naval issues.<sup>55</sup>

On the whole, except in light of much later developments, Prior's attempt to create a viable Treaty of Commerce and system of free-trade between France and Britain failed. Yet its importance in the scheme of history lies in the fact that it was at all possible for any such negotiation to get as far as it did in the highest days of mercantilism and monopolistic trading arrangements. Whatever progress possible was in part due to the home government, but its practical application was due almost entirely to Prior's unceasing attentions and to his ability to persuade the French and his masters of the benefits of the specific articles. Here, unlike in the case of the actual Treaty of Utrecht, Prior had a great deal of control and personal responsibility, and the Commercial Treaty stands as his greatest work in the public sphere. It is truly to be lamented that this Treaty failed to pass the House of Commons, for in the present case the historian must consider the normally dangerous historical 'what if' and imagine the tremendous audacity of a suggestion of free-trade at the beginning of the Eighteenth-Century, and must be aware that had the Treaty gone ahead and had Britain and France remained allies, the shape of the entire Eighteenth-Century and of the world since that time would have been vastly different; in the main part thanks to Mr. Matthew Prior.

---

<sup>55</sup> See D. Armitage; The Ideological Origins of the British Empire. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge 2000. p. 185. and D. Armitage (Ed.); 'Introduction.' in Bolingbroke; Political Writings. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1997. p. xxiii.

## Chapter IV *Matt, Harry, and the Idea of a Patriot King*

Although the picture of Matthew Prior that must emerge from the previous chapters is one of a civil servant carrying out government policy, he also managed to blend in a measure of political involvement and theorizing in a manner that demonstrates once again his knowledge of, and yet distance from, the politics of his day. In the period of party quarrel and dispute between the Glorious Revolution and the accession of the House of Hanover much changed and many men attempted to alter the shape of the nation in line with the Revolution Settlement. Yet Prior advanced one of the most impossible, ambitious and advanced political theories, a theory and ideal that was to be like those discussed above insofar as it was not realized or accepted until the middle of the Eighteenth-Century, when Bolingbroke made claims for a new settlement of the political system on the ideals Prior had enunciated forty years before. It may seem surprising to note that Prior was talking of a union between the feuding parties, a union under an altruistic and ‘patriotic’ king decades before Bolingbroke was to publish his two great works on the idea, the Dissertation Upon Parties and the Idea of a Patriot King.<sup>1</sup> Prior’s prophecy of these ideals (or perhaps creation given that he and Bolingbroke were close friends and that they discussed such issues), indicates a far-reaching concern for the security and benefit of the nation in light of its newly formed institutions of party government and Parliamentary monarchy. This chapter will demonstrate his application of these ideas and their similarities with those of Bolingbroke, as well as their connection to the friendship of Matt and Harry.

---

<sup>1</sup> The two full titles of these works are actually A Dissertation Upon Parties; In Several Letters to Caleb D’Anvers, Esq; and LETTERS, on the Spirit of PATRIOTISM: on the Idea of a PATRIOT KING: and On the STATE of PARTIES, At the Accession of King GEORGE the First.

The period in question in such a connection happens to be rather important in light of the momentous changes taking place, although it is perhaps no surprise that at either end there should be those who were theorizing about what form the system of government was to eventually take. Both Prior's and Bolingbroke's theories of government emerged out of troubles, but it must be said that Prior's period saw the greatest upheaval of the system. After the Glorious Revolution and during the extraordinarily innovative reign of William III, compared to those of his predecessors, the system of party government began to crystallize following a long period of vehement hatred between various sectional groups that had lasted since the Civil Wars.<sup>2</sup> The period also saw the rise of a country faction against the court, as distinct from the divisions of Whig and Tory.<sup>3</sup> These developments were the background to Prior's introduction into politics, although by the time of Bolingbroke's later ascendancy the existing system had been replaced with a one of rival courts rather than of court versus country.

By the end of the post-Revolution Stuart period there were to be further divisions and recriminations between the two mainstream parties, as the first two Hanoverian monarchs became almost entirely associated with the Whigs, and even proscribed and excluded the Tories from forming administrations (in part due to suspicion of the latter party's ties to Jacobitism).<sup>4</sup> However, by the latter years of Walpole's Premiership, Bolingbroke was using the same platform and invocations that had been used by Prior, in order to make the claim that the Whigs had abandoned the Revolution and its ideals in

---

<sup>2</sup> J. Scott; England's Troubles: Seventeenth-Century English Political Instability in European Context. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 2000. p. 493. Compare Scott's position on these matters to that of Holmes in G. Holmes; British Politics in the Age of Anne. Revised Edition. The Hambledon Press. London. 1987. (1967.)

<sup>3</sup> J.H. Plumb; The Growth of Political Stability in England, 1675-1725. Penguin Books. London. Undated. (based on lectures given in 1965.) p. 137.

<sup>4</sup> L. Colley; In Defiance of Oligarchy: The Tory Party, 1714-60. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1982. p. 202.

favour of consolidating their own rule.<sup>5</sup> There is no doubt that during the 1730's and 1740's a great change was occurring in British politics,<sup>6</sup> but the arguments used and the avowed aims, in many ways proposed by Bolingbroke, were connected to the earlier period of upheaval, and were the same as those used and advocated by Prior in those early days before Bolingbroke's career in politics had really begun.

In these days at the turn of the century Prior had seen much in the diplomatic world and at court, was quite fond of King William and was an undoubted supporter of the Glorious Revolution. He had acted until the end of the reign of that King as a diplomat carrying out Whig policies overseas, and it has been suggested that he became a Whig at the time as a result of that specific factor,<sup>7</sup> and because of his personal attachment to several prominent Whigs (particularly the Earl of Jersey).<sup>8</sup> He ran for Parliament twice, and sat in the short-lived Parliament of 1701,<sup>9</sup> yet his party affiliation becomes unclear, for he voted for the impeachment of the lords who had assented to the Partition Treaty (a treaty that both he and his friend Jersey had done much to make). His motives in these political exchanges seem to have been noble, as they were when he first agreed to stand for Cambridge prior to his election in the February 1701 Parliament on the grounds: "that I understood they would have some person whose principle it was to represent, as occasion must require, their steadiness to support the true rights of the English monarchy and the real

---

<sup>5</sup> D. Armitage (Ed.); 'Introduction.' in Bolingbroke; Political Writings. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1997. p. xii. It should also be said that the generally accepted view of this period of party 'co-operation' in modern historiography is that any attempt at unity and alliance was not a practical approach to the politics of the day, but rather a fanciful hope that was inherently impractical. See Colley and Goldie; 'The Principles and Practice of Eighteenth-Century Party.' in The Historical Journal. Vol. 22. No. 1. March 1979. p. 240-41.

<sup>6</sup> D. Armitage; The Ideological Origins of the British Empire. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge 2000. p. 170.

<sup>7</sup> F. Bickley; The Life of Matthew Prior. Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons Ltd. London. 1914. p. 120.

<sup>8</sup> L.G.W. Legg; Matthew Prior: A Study of His Public Career and Correspondence. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1921. pp. 123-24.

<sup>9</sup> Bickley; Matthew Prior. p. 119.

preservation of theirs and the nation's liberty."<sup>10</sup> The language used here is undoubtedly the language of the Revolution, and despite his shift towards the Tories in the subsequent reign, Prior used the same language as the basis for his political opinions.<sup>11</sup> By 1706 he was connected politically to Marlborough (who was then still a moderate Tory),<sup>12</sup> and when the Whigs came to power later that year he was turned out of his position on the Board of Trade because of his incompatibility with the new administration (see above, Chapter III).<sup>13</sup> By the Tory return to office in 1710 Mr. Prior was within the circle of friends of Robert Harley, now leader of a Tory government,<sup>14</sup> and yet maintained his contact with the now Whig Duke of Marlborough.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, Prior remained open-minded about the party divisions that so divided the men of his period, despite the fact that he had been clearly marked as a Tory and that his actions during that administration served only to confirm that fact (see Chapters II and III, above). As a result of his affiliation with the Tories the change of parties at the coming of King George left him out in the wilderness of political events, as with diplomacy, for the remainder of his life.

Prior's refusal to countenance the divisions of party showed itself most strikingly in his political integrity (oxymoronic as that may seem in that period) and in his "disinterested zeal"<sup>16</sup> for the service of his country and King or Queen. Accordingly he was willing to put friendship and principle aside in order to secure the best benefits for his country, and thus

---

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Prior to [J.] Talbot. 1700, Oct. 4[-15]. London. in H.M.C. Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquis of Bath, preserved at Longleat, Wiltshire. Volume III (Prior Papers). H.M.S.O. Hereford. 1908. (Hereafter known as Bath MSS. III.) p. 423.

<sup>11</sup> It is clear, however, that by the time of the Revolution many Tories were aware of the dangers to the state occasioned by the reign of James II and VII, and were inclined to move towards 'Whiggish arguments' concerning the liberties of England (and also of the Church). See M. Goldie; 'Edmund Bohun and *Jus Gentium* in the Revolution Debate, 1689-1693.' in The Historical Journal. Vol. 20. No. 3. Sept. 1977. p. 575.

<sup>12</sup> Bickley; Matthew Prior. p. 136.

<sup>13</sup> L.E. Merians; Matthew Prior: A Biographical Study. University of Maryland. Ph.D. 1983. Unpublished. Sourced from University Microfilms International. Ann Arbor. p. 48.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 70.

<sup>15</sup> Bickley; Matthew Prior. p. 144.

<sup>16</sup> The Earl of Cholmondeley to Matthew Prior. 1710, Sept. 19[-30]. in Bath MSS. III. p. 442.

became the model of loyal, non-party Parliamentary service towards which he believed all should aspire: “Mr. PRIOR’s Attachment to any particular Man, could not make him forego his real Principles; which led him to pursue the Peace and Happiness, rather than the Honour and Reputation, of his Country.”<sup>17</sup> With these altruistic ideals in mind he negotiated the Treaty of Utrecht in later years, despite the poor opinion such a deal gave of his party and nation in the eyes of the Dutch and the rest of Europe. That being said, he was still concerned that the rest of Europe should see Britain acting in concert for the peace, as against the reputation that nation had developed for party squabbles and disagreements in the period since the Restoration: “As for my own part, I vow to God, I care not; but I would have these people see, that we act unanimously, and as becomes a nation; that our orders, and our councils are of a piece.”<sup>18</sup> Perhaps this seems the manifesto of a disinterested civil servant, rather than a party politician, but that is exactly what Prior wanted his colleagues in Parliament and in the parties to become. That is the idea outlined in many of his letters throughout his life, and most importantly of two in particular, to the Earl of Portland in March 1698/9, that have been recognized for some time, but not properly exposed, as offering the embryonic ideas shaped and used by Bolingbroke in his Idea of a Patriot King:<sup>19</sup> and in the long poem, ‘Alma’, dating from Prior’s period in captivity, which lays

---

<sup>17</sup> The HISTORY of His Own Time. Compiled from the ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS Of His late EXCELLENCY MATTHEW PRIOR Esq; Revised and Signed by Himself, and Copied fair for the Press by Mr. ADRIAN DRIFT, His Executor. Printed for the Editor. London. 1740. p. 258.

<sup>18</sup> From Mr. Prior. Fontainbleau, September 12, 1712. in Letters and Correspondence, Public and Private, of the Right Honourable Henry St. John, Lord Visc. Bolingbroke; During the time he was Secretary of State to Queen Anne; with state papers, explanatory notes, and a translation of the foreign letters &c. By Gilbert Parke. G.G. and J. Robinson. London 1798. (Hereafter known as Bolingbroke Letters.) Volume III. p. 58.

<sup>19</sup> See for comment upon this matter Eves; Matthew Prior. p. 157. and J.M. Rigg’s ‘Introduction’ to Bath MSS. III, p. xii.

out similar ideals and concepts.<sup>20</sup> It is very common to find his counsel for his less advanced colleagues echo from his works of poetry:

Vote Right thô certain to be blam'd  
And rather Starve than be asham'd  
This method I shou'd fancy best  
You may think otherwise, I rest.<sup>21</sup>

The nature of these political theories, and their relationship to those of Bolingbroke, must however be dealt with at greater depth, and form the basis of the remainder of the present chapter.

There can be no question but that the end of the Seventeenth- and beginning of the Eighteenth-Centuries saw the greatest manifestation of party disputes as against those that followed,<sup>22</sup> with many new governments even bringing criminal actions against the individuals previously responsible for policy. However, “that it kept the country ideologically within the seventeenth century is evident on all hands”<sup>23</sup> as Jonathan Scott has argued, is not true, if only because of Prior’s staunch opposition to such ferocious partisanship. Certainly, both his and Bolingbroke’s opinions of the period indicate that faction and party strife was a tremendous problem, but Prior at least attempted to classify and describe the disputes of party in order that they might be supplanted by amity, as did Bolingbroke: “THERE is no complaint, which hath been more constantly in the mouths, no grief hath lain more heavily at the hearts of all good men, than those about our national divisions; about the spirit of party, which inspires animosity and breeds rancour;”.<sup>24</sup> Both

---

<sup>20</sup> Merians; Matthew Prior. p. 188.

<sup>21</sup> ‘True Statesmen.’ (1714.) in Wright and Spears (Eds.); The Literary Works of Matthew Prior. Second Ed. Oxford University Press. London. 1971. Volume I. p. 412. lines 36-39.

<sup>22</sup> Scott; England’s Troubles. p. 491.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 491-92.

<sup>24</sup> (Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke); A Dissertation Upon Parties; In Several Letters to Caleb D’Anvers, Esq; The Eighth Edition. R. Francklin. London. 1754. (Hereafter known as Bolingbroke; Dissertation.) p. 7.

men seem to have been greatly concerned at the spirit of division and faction, and it would appear that faction overshadowed any work that was, or could be, done by any Parliament or ministry, and that it proliferated as “Factions and Reflections go on and prosper as formerly.”<sup>25</sup> The problem of course was that party acrimony would exhaust the nation, as Prior commented with the following metaphor from ‘Alma’:

The Man who struggles in the Fight,  
Fatigues left Arm, as well as right:<sup>26</sup>

This was the problem of party, as far as Prior was concerned, but Bolingbroke went one further, forty years later, in defining faction as an extreme form of party division, and thus the most violent and dangerous manifestation of that problem: “For *faction* is to *party* what the *superlative* is to the *positive*: *party* is a political evil, and *faction* is the worst of all parties.”<sup>27</sup> The result was of course the subjugation of the nation’s interests to those of minor factions, and to those of their constituent members.<sup>28</sup> In one of the two letters to Portland on the subject Prior held forth on the dangers as far as the King’s interests went, and maintained that the King himself was made the victim and tool of such disputes: “The Whigs have given him good words, and seem to do their best in Parliament for his interest; but if they do their best, or no, or only (as I say) seem to do it is the question, since it is

---

<sup>25</sup> (Prior to Manchester.) Whitehall; Nov. 30/Dec. 10, 1699. in Prior; History of His Own Time. p. 140.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Alma: or, The Progress of the Mind. In Three Cantos.’ (1718.) in Prior; Literary Works. Volume I. pp. 488-89. Canto II. lines 133-34.

<sup>27</sup> (Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke); LETTERS, on the Spirit of PATRIOTISM: on the Idea of a PATRIOT KING: and On the STATE of PARTIES, At the Accession of King GEORGE the First. A. Millar. London. 1749. (Hereafter known as Bolingbroke; Patriot King.) p. 148. It is interesting to compare the position of Prior and Bolingbroke as regards faction to that of Niccolo Machiavelli, who stated in his Discourses that the greatness and freedom of Rome (the ideal state for British political thinkers at this stage in history) was due to the very element of faction that is denounced by Prior and Bolingbroke. See N. Machiavelli; The Discourses. trans. L.J. Walker, S.J. Penguin Books. London. 1998. (1970.) pp. 113-15.

<sup>28</sup> C.K. Eves; Matthew Prior: Poet and Diplomatist. Columbia University Press. New York. 1939. pp. 129-30.



evident that most of those members...are those who have obstructed the King's business,"<sup>29</sup>

Such a personal use of the responsibility vested in the members of Parliament seems to have very much offended Prior, and where he lamented the state of the nation in the reign of King William, he continued his protests into that of George I, and argued in 'Alma' that:

Some Limbs again in Bulk or Stature  
Unlike and not a-kin by Nature,  
In Concert act, like modern Friends;  
Because one serves t'other's Ends.<sup>30</sup>

Prior's claim is that parties are unnatural conglomerations of sectional interests raised on the principle that the "Majority of Voices rules"<sup>31</sup> and are thus destructive, yet Bolingbroke's approach was different, that parties had been at one time natural and necessary and had only recently descended into the depths from which both theorizing Tories hoped to rescue them.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, he commented on the lack of any principle whatsoever in these organizations, a concern that must also have irked Prior the principled and disinterested thinker: "A man who has not seen the inside of parties, nor had opportunities to examine nearly their secret motives, can hardly conceive how little a share, principle of any sort, though principle of some sort is always pretended, has in the determination of their conduct."<sup>33</sup>

The resulting self-interest of parties and their members was of great danger to Britain in the minds of both Prior and Bolingbroke, and most alarmingly, of great danger to

---

<sup>29</sup> Matthew Prior to the Earl of Portland. 169[8-]9, March 18. [N.S.] Paris. in Bath MSS. III. p. 324.

<sup>30</sup> 'Alma.' (1718.) in Prior; Literary Works. Volume I. p. 489. Canto II. lines 152-55.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* Volume I. p. 503. Canto III. line 112.

<sup>32</sup> Bolingbroke; Dissertation. p. xxiii.

<sup>33</sup> Bolingbroke; Patriot King. pp. 172-73.

the constitution as it stood as a result of the Revolution Settlement. Prior compared the situation to the danger posed not only by James II's attempt to create universal monarchy, but to the difficulties of the Civil Wars, when parties again fiercely fought one another: "And it should be intimated that some of these men who are most violent in this matter are breaking into our constitution as much as those who in former reigns were for realigning the penal laws and tests, it being the same thing to the nation if we are hurt by bad subjects or by a bad King, and that we suffered as much by popular rage in '45 as by arbitrary power in '88."<sup>34</sup> Bolingbroke likewise claims in the Dissertation that the divisions of party were a danger to the constitution, and blamed those "whose excesses brought liberty to the very brink of ruin."<sup>35</sup> The final political result of such disputes was the danger threatening the Protestant Succession, Prior being concerned in the reign of King William that both parties would make efforts in their own favour that could very well end by destroying the monarchy:

But if Whigg gets the better  
 You'll see how he'll fetter  
 And hamstring our royal Intreger  
 If the Tory prevails  
 In comes little Wales  
 And have we not acted with vigour?<sup>36</sup>

The final objection on Prior's part was that parties did not only offer a danger to the Succession, but a personal danger, to him and to others, in particular in an artistic sense and in light of the abilities of individuals to make personal contributions to the state: "'Tis the Misfortune of our *Athens*, like that of ancient *Greece*, to be govern'd by a set number of Tyrants: The Works of Learned Men are weigh'd here by the unerring Balance of Party;

---

<sup>34</sup> Matthew Prior to the Earl of Portland. 169[8-]9, March 11. [N.S.] Paris. in Bath MSS. III. p. 320.

<sup>35</sup> Bolingbroke; Dissertation. p. v.

<sup>36</sup> 'Ballad.' (1701.) in Prior; Literary Works. Volume I. p. 192. lines 37-42.

and he is sure to be most ingenious in his Writings, who is, in their Phrase, most *thorough-pac'd* in his Politicks.”<sup>37</sup> Prior ended by objecting to parties as a diplomat, as a politician, as a member of the Church of England, and as a poet; a strong reason to declare against the system that allowed these abuses and to offer suggestions to solve the problem that were later taken up by his friend Harry.<sup>38</sup>

Bolingbroke and Prior as a result of their reflections on parties considered, that the reasons for the initial party division having passed out of any relevance to political matters,<sup>39</sup> the solution would be that those would be needed who “are looked on to be honest and moderate.”<sup>40</sup> The solution would be a union of the existing parties in the service of the state, whereby they would subjugate their personal desires to the greater good, along the lines of the model established by Prior in ‘Alma’,<sup>41</sup> and based, according to Bolingbroke, on the fact that the two parties were actually very similar when all was said and done.<sup>42</sup> Prior’s associated belief being that this would elevate the nation to even greater heights than it had before reached:

that all Things, on Occasion,  
Love Union, and desire Adhesion;  
That ALMA merely is a Scale;  
And Motives, like the Weights, prevail.  
If neither Side turn down or up,  
With Loss or Gain, with Fear or Hope;  
The Balance always could hang ev’n,  
Like MAH’MET’s Tomb, ‘twixt Earth and Heav’n.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> ‘The Examiner. Numb. 6. From Thursday, August 31. to Thursday, September 7. 1710.’ in Prior; Literary Works. Volume I. p. 389. lines 9-13.

<sup>38</sup> H.C. Mansfield; Statesmanship and Party Government: A Study of Burke and Bolingbroke. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1965. p. 66.

<sup>39</sup> See To Mr. Prior. Whitehall, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1714. in Bolingbroke Letters. Volume IV. p. 509. and also Bolingbroke; Dissertation. pp. 96-97.

<sup>40</sup> (Prior) To the Earl of MANCHESTER. Dec. 10, 1700. O.S. in Prior; History of His Own Time. p. 182.

<sup>41</sup> Merians; Matthew Prior. p. 167.

<sup>42</sup> Bolingbroke; Dissertation. p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Alma.’ (1718.) in Prior; Literary Works. Volume I. p. 490. Canto II. lines 92-99.

The balance was eventually achieved by Bolingbroke in his later career,<sup>44</sup> but nonetheless Prior's aim seems impossible enough in light of the political divisions of the period. Even so his solution became Bolingbroke's model, and Bolingbroke also relied on the idea of a union of the parties to regain that which had been lost by the machinations of sectional interests.<sup>45</sup> However, he too had been guilty of fomenting such divisions, and remarked during his period as Secretary of State that "Opposition from the Whigs I always expected, and shall, I hope, always deserve."<sup>46</sup> These are hardly the words of a man who at the same time might be thinking of a union of his own party with that very one whose enmity he so wished to deserve.

Party acrimony of that sort is in keeping with the suggestion that Bolingbroke's development of his own concept of union was a later event, and that it was based upon Prior's thought, not on some divine inspiration. The previous suggestion fits with Prior's comprehension of his plan, for he himself believed that he alone could not effect any change, but that it would have to be begun by a suitably important figure: "The peevishness of our friends at St. Stephen's Chapel<sup>47</sup> is sufficient to make any man wish for a cloister, but I hope in God Your Lordship is above all such thoughts, for 'tis from such men as you that the tide must be stemmed and the waves broken:"<sup>48</sup> This declaration is part of the second letter to Portland outlining Prior's 'plan' but the Earl seems to have lacked the conviction that an apolitical monarch and ministry could work against the existing state of

---

<sup>44</sup> Colley; *In Defiance of Oligarchy*. p. 90.

<sup>45</sup> Bolingbroke; *Patriot King*. pp. 250-51. ('On the STATE of PARTIES, At the Accession of King *GEORGE* the First.')

<sup>46</sup> Viscount Bolingbroke to the Lord Treasurer. 1713, July 27. in H.M.C. *Report on the Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Portland, K.G., preserved at Welbeck Abbey. Volume V.* H.M.S.O. Norwich. 1899. (Hereafter known as *Portland MSS. V.*) p. 311.

<sup>47</sup> The place where meetings of the House of Commons were held in the old Palace of Westminster.

<sup>48</sup> Matthew Prior to the Earl of Portland. 169[8-]9, March 18. [N.S.] Paris. in *Bath MSS. III.* p. 325.

parties.<sup>49</sup> Yet Prior tried again, fifteen years later with another peer: “England must be saved, my Lord, and it cannot be done either by fools or cowards; though both these sects of Philosophers will find all imaginable faults with you, while you are doing it; ...you must do your duty, that you must think that duty proportional to the great abilities God has given you, and that you must give your chagrin to the waves and wind.”<sup>50</sup> The nobleman in question was no other than the Lord Viscount Bolingbroke, and Prior’s advocacy of his position to the man who later used it as the basis of his entire political ideology cannot but speak volumes to the historian, who must begin to question by whom the concept of union was first floated.

The other instrument of such an effort, according to both the systems of Prior and Bolingbroke (and here again the similarities indicate some borrowing or appropriation) was to be the central figure, who Bolingbroke called the ‘Patriot King’ and who would: “Instead of abetting the divisions of his people, he will endeavour to unite them, and to be himself the centre of their union: instead of putting himself at the head of *one party* in order to govern *his people*, he will put himself at the head of *his people* in order to govern, or more properly to subdue *all parties*.”<sup>51</sup> These were the duties of Bolingbroke’s ideal King, and it was supposed to be his task to prevent the resurgence of that corruption that led to the difficulties of party dispute.<sup>52</sup> In Prior’s case the same is true, and he here again anticipated the later theory when he stated that the King must make his own party, based not on common sectional interests, but on those of the nation: “the remedy to be found to this evil is that in one and the other party some should be gained by His Majesty’s goodness and

---

<sup>49</sup> The Earl of Portland to Matthew Prior. [1698-9], March 16-26. Kensington. in Bath MSS. III. p. 326.

<sup>50</sup> From Mr. Prior. Paris, March 12<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup>, 1714. in Bolingbroke Letters. Volume IV. pp. 502-03.

<sup>51</sup> Bolingbroke; Patriot King. p. 149.

<sup>52</sup> Mansfield; Statesmanship and Party Government. p. 70.

kindness, and others made sensible of his displeasure; this was practised by King Henry the 7<sup>th</sup> and Queen Elizabeth with success, who, as I observed to Your Lordship, were our best Princes, and ruled us best.”<sup>53</sup> The final solution to the party problem should therefore have come not from the members of those parties uniting entirely of their own accord, but from their unification at the initiation of a benevolent and thoroughly patriotically-minded monarch. According to both theories the King should never use parties specifically, and Bolingbroke goes so far as to say that whilst parties may have survived in some form in the ideal state, the King should never espouse one over another.<sup>54</sup> This is an interesting thought in light of the more modern system of monarchy whereby the monarch is expressly forbidden any affiliation with one or the other political party. Moreover, the king was intended to take a special role in the running of his nation, and that: “His Majesty, upon the many occupations he has, must (according to my wise policies) e’en take one other trouble upon him; he must be his own Minister, and direct his Council, or at least some of them, what he would have done, rather than rely upon their advice as to what he should do.”<sup>55</sup> The ideal system places the King in the new position enjoyed by William III, that of a ‘chairman of the board’ in control of a proper Cabinet, a system whereby the patriotic centre of government might have reined-in his more inappropriate ministers and made decisions based upon what he should actually know, instead of what his lackeys and

---

<sup>53</sup> Matthew Prior to the Earl of Portland. 169[8-]9, March 18. [N.S.] Paris. in Bath MSS. III. p. 324.

<sup>54</sup> Bolingbroke; Patriot King. pp. 161-62.

<sup>55</sup> Matthew Prior to the Earl of Portland. 169[8-]9, March 18. [N.S.] Paris. in Bath MSS. III. p. 324.

advisors might tell him.<sup>56</sup> Therefore the patriotic king of Prior and Bolingbroke should also have had to seek the best advice imaginable, and was to avoid all hollow flattery.<sup>57</sup>

Prior was obviously modelling his ideal monarch on, in addition to Henry VII and Elizabeth, William, and was saying that the King had the power and the ability to create an admirable form of government if only he attempted it: “I will only observe further on this head that the King’s speech as soon almost as he was on the throne, in which he said he would sustain the greatness of the monarchy, did him more service than any speech he has made since, and that the body and commonalty of the people of England love the glory of monarchy in general, and will keep up that of the King in particular who has done such great things for us, if they are rightly managed.”<sup>58</sup> It has also been suggested that this was in keeping with William’s own view of his position, and that here Prior was recognizing and echoing the sentiments of his sovereign as concerned his own power.<sup>59</sup> Certainly, Prior’s poetry and other writings of the period bear out William was the model of his ‘Patriot King’,<sup>60</sup> although even after William’s death he did not give up hope of such another.<sup>61</sup> Bolingbroke too had his practical model, but whereas Prior’s had secured the nation’s liberty and created the opening for the Revolution Settlement, Bolingbroke’s was merely a hope for the future: “To finish the great work, which king WILLIAM began, of establishing the liberties of Britain on firm and durable foundations, must be imputed an

---

<sup>56</sup> This concept of avoiding flattery is common to that of Machiavelli in The Prince, his great work on the ideal ruler, for he too suggests that a prince requires good advice, and should shun those who seek to flatter him for their own ends. See N. Machiavelli; The Prince. trans. G. Bull. Penguin Books. London. 1999. (1961.) pp. 76-77.

<sup>57</sup> Armitage; ‘Introduction’ to Bolingbroke: Political Writings. p. xxii.

<sup>58</sup> Matthew Prior to the Earl of Portland. 169[8-]9, March 11. [N.S.] Paris. in Bath MSS. III. p. 320.

<sup>59</sup> Bickley; Matthew Prior. p. 126.

<sup>60</sup> “That, Death and Hell disarm’d, She lives and reigns,/Her freedom Kept by Him who broke her chains.” Prior; Verses Humbly presented to the King At His Arrival in Holland, After the Discovery of the late horrid Conspiracy Against His most Sacred Person. By Mr. Prior. Jacob Tonson. London. 1696. p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> As in the case of his poem on King Solomon, ‘Solomon on the Vanity of the World. A Poem in Three Books.’ (1708.) in Prior; Literary Works. Volume I. p. 384.

honour surely; and to whom can this honour belong more justly than to a prince, who emulates in so remarkable a manner all the other heroic virtues of his renown'd predecessor?"<sup>62</sup>

The new William was to be Frederick, Prince of Wales, heir to George II, who was identified with an alternative court to that of his father.<sup>63</sup> His circle was that of the patriot party raised by Bolingbroke, it was before these men that 'Rule Britannia', encapsulating many of the Tory ideals, would be first performed in 1740 at the Prince's house, Cliveden. When in 1747 Frederick issued his famous Carlton House Declaration he was making it clear that he sided with the moderate Whigs and Tories who supported Bolingbroke.<sup>64</sup> The longed-for accession was not to be, as Frederick died nine years before his father, and instead it was his son who became the focus of Tory attempts to return to power and represented the fulfilment of Prior's and Bolingbroke's dream, that a new, nationally supported king would ensure the future prosperity and liberty of Britain and her Empire.<sup>65</sup>

In the details of his literary and epistolary productions can be seen the significance of Prior's theory of parties and of kingship, in particular in light of later developments. In each aspect of his own plan Bolingbroke carried through these concepts from Prior's initial conception, the only exception being that he lacked the monarch who Prior was privileged to know, and had only the *hope* attached to the younger generation. Prior's plan, therefore, was far ahead of his own time, whilst all around him were fomenting and perpetuating party divisions he alone seems to have cherished the dream of a more peaceable and unified political system in which the benefit of the nation as a whole and of her own interests could

---

<sup>62</sup> Bolingbroke; *Dissertation*, p. 157.

<sup>63</sup> Armitage; 'Introduction' to *Bolingbroke; Political Writings*, p. xx.

<sup>64</sup> Colley; *In Defiance of Oligarchy*, pp. 103-04.

<sup>65</sup> Armitage; *Ideological Origins*, p. 185.



be sought, rather than the minor sectional and personal demands of selfish and bigoted men. The plan laid out by Matthew Prior in the letters to Portland and in 'Alma' formed the nucleus of Bolingbroke's much later and much more famous scheme, and has been largely neglected, like so much else relating to Prior, but it remains clear that here again Prior made a significant contribution to the public life of his country and that Matt and Harry, the old friends and colleagues, together, over a period of forty years, made the Patriot King.

## Conclusion

### *'Britannia Rules the Waves' – A seventy-year legacy*

In the midst of the History of His Own Time, which is still by far the best single source regarding the life of Matthew Prior, and which has not been reprinted since its first two editions in 1740, the ever present narrator affirms his simple purpose: “Mr. PRIOR’s Name recurs almost every where, as of a Gentleman in the highest Confidence. Neither the Nature of my Design, nor the Room I have proscribed myself, will permit me to make long Researches. If I furnish Memoirs for those who may hereafter compile a more general History to supply the Place of what Mr. PRIOR intended, I hope sufficiently to answer the Expectation of my Readers.”<sup>1</sup> It has been my intention to do something of the sort, and although there have been full-length biographies of Prior written,<sup>2</sup> nothing substantial has been said in a historical sense since the last of those, in 1939, and even those initial works made it clear that their intention was not to *evaluate* the life of Matthew Prior, or delve deeply into that life, but rather to cover the entire range of his existence, as is to be expected of biography. Strangely enough, all three works contain twelve chapters, and of those only two are in each case dedicated to the most important period of Prior’s life, that which in the main has been the subject of the present work. It has been the intention of this thesis to ‘resurrect’ as it were, Mr. Prior and to indicate his exceeding importance in the history of his nation, and it can be said, in that of the world of his day. The above has by no means been an exhaustive study, his poetry, an immense contribution in itself, has not been central

---

<sup>1</sup> The HISTORY of His Own Time. Compiled from the ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS Of His late EXCELLENCY MATTHEW PRIOR Esq; Revised and Signed by Himself, and Copied fair for the Press by Mr. ADRIAN DRIFT, His Executor. Printed for the Editor. London. 1740. pp. 141-42.

<sup>2</sup> See F. Bickley; The Life of Matthew Prior. Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons Ltd. London. 1914.; L.G.W. Legg; Matthew Prior: A Study of His Public Career and Correspondence. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1921.; C.K. Eves; Matthew Prior: Poet and Diplomatist. Columbia University Press. New York. 1939.

except as far as it relates to the matters dealt with here. However, it can be said that the four chapters that make up my work are as those proofs given by Prior himself in one of his poems, and that:

Examples I could cite You more;  
But be contented with these Four  
For when One's Proofs are aptly chosen;  
Four are as valid as four Dozen.<sup>3</sup>

In the present case this is certainly true, for it is hoped that the three main chapters (the first being more an introduction to Prior's earlier lessons and importance) indicate to some degree the significance and importance of Prior's life. The Treaty of Utrecht and its accompanying Treaty of Commerce were of tremendous significance in Britain's foreign policy, trading, and imperial development, and the former of these served as the basis for much of her power throughout the Eighteenth-Century,<sup>4</sup> at least until the loss of the American colonies caused a radical re-thinking of the nature of that imperial system. Prior's actions in France between 1711 and 1714 resulted in the final break with the Dutch that put an end to a long period of friendship, interspersed with fighting, and even if the French alliance did not last, there is some indication that in these treaties the historian can see the establishment of Britain and France as the two most powerful nations in Europe and in the wider world. The rise of these powers was to greatly effect the subsequent development of the entire world in light of their imperial reach.

---

<sup>3</sup> 'Alma: or, The Progress of the Mind. In Three Cantos.' (1718.) Wright and Spears (Eds.); The Literary Works of Matthew Prior. Second Ed. Oxford University Press. London. 1971. Volume I. p. 484. Canto I. lines 513-16

<sup>4</sup> P.K. O'Brien; 'Inseparable Connections: Trade, Economy, Fiscal State, and the Expansion of Empire, 1688-1815.' p.65. and B.P. Lenman; 'Colonial Wars and Imperial Instability, 1688-1793.' p.156., both in P.J. Marshall; The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume II. The Eighteenth Century. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2001. (1998.)

By the middle of the Eighteenth-Century, the ideas enshrined in Prior's foreign policy negotiations were being put into practical use as Britain entered the Seven Years War with what had by then become clearly *Tory* war aims, centred on blue-water conceptions of power and on the significance of the colonial world for Britain.<sup>5</sup> Even by the 1730's and '40's, Prior's ideas had become the centre of a new Toryism, as Bolingbroke and his allies sought safety in the navy, in unfettered trade, and in the possession of colonies; and as Prior's conception of a union of parties under a patriotic prince became a reality with the Tory-Whig moderate alliance under Frederick. Even if these concepts were not consciously derived from those of Prior, his capability of seeing these options whilst others around him fought on the Continent, supported mercantilism, and cursed the opposing party; demonstrates that he was truly ahead of his time. When these true Eighteenth-Century Tories and moderate Whigs first heard the claim that 'Britannia rules the waves' in 1740 their nation really was on the way towards achieving that rule and sway over the seas that ensured the *Pax Britannica* throughout the next century.<sup>6</sup> And, if Bolingbroke and his associates were capable of this it was because they stood on the shoulders of giants, or rather of one, who had tested all of their theories years before, and who had offered up his work to the nation secure in the knowledge that, as one of his contemporaries put it: "Tis

---

<sup>5</sup> L. Colley; In Defiance of Oligarchy: The Tory Party, 1714-60. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1982. p. 278. This has generally been considered to be the Tory position in the Eighteenth-Century. See (amongst others) Lord G. Elton; Imperial Commonwealth. Collins. London. 1945.; J.H. Plumb; The First Four Georges. Penguin Books. London. 2000. (1956).; D. Jarrett; Britain, 1688-1815. Longmans Green and Co. Ltd. London. 1966.; D. Armitage; The Ideological Origins of the British Empire. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Armitage; Ideological Origins. p. 186. See also N.A.M. Rodger; 'Sea-Power and Empire, 1688-1793.' in Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume II. pp. 169-82.

not in Mortals to Command Success,/But we'll do more, Sempronius; we'll Deserve it.”<sup>7</sup>

Deserve it he did, but he was not in his own time to enjoy the fruits of his own labour, nor indeed since then, for, like so many other servants of his country, he toiled and worked in the darkness, or the reflected glow of his more famous contemporaries, for her benefit.

Matthew Prior, ‘minor’ diplomat worked the hardest perhaps of any towards the goals of his party and of his country, and did more for his fellow Englishmen than may ever be known.

The greatest testament to Prior’s influence and apparent significance came from his opponents, the Whigs, who on coming to power at the accession of King George I in 1714 brought Prior before a Special Committee of the House of Commons and subsequently imprisoned him. He was charged with making the Treaty of Utrecht (thought by the Whigs to have been treasonous), his personal papers were seized and he was called upon to denounce his friend and colleague the Earl of Oxford. That he did not do so should come as no surprise, and his year of restraint shared with Oxford, whilst Bolingbroke fled to the Continent, demonstrates once again his central position in the Tory government (and in the actions of that government) in the minds of his enemies, and his belief in his own actions on behalf of his country. Perhaps his epitaph should have been the lines which he inscribed in the front of a book for his friend the Duke of Shrewsbury, for never was one so badly served by his nation, and so ready to continue to serve her:

Thus shall fair BRITAIN with a gracious Smile  
Accept the Work; and the instructed Isle,  
For more than Treaties made, shall bless my Toil.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> *Cato. A Tragedy. As it is Acted at the THEATRE-ROYAL in Drury Lane, by Her Majesty’s Servants.* By Mr. Addison. The Seventh Edition. Jacob Tonson. London. 1713. Act I. Scene II. p. 7. (Sempronius is the character to whom Portius speaks these lines in the play).

<sup>8</sup> ‘Written in Montaigne’s *Essays*, Given to the Duke of Shrewsbury in France after the Peace, 1713.’ in Prior; *Literary Works*. Volume I. p. 402. lines 7-9.

## Bibliography

For a list of all of the available letters written by or addressed to Matthew Prior see 'The Matthew Prior Project', sponsored by the libraries of Miami University, at <http://digital.lib.muohio.edu/prior/>.

### **Primary Sources:**

Addison, J.; Cato. A Tragedy. As it is Acted at the THEATRE-ROYAL in *Drury Lane*, by Her Majesty's Servants. The Seventh Edition. Jacob Tonson. London. 1713.

(Bolingbroke, H. St. John, Viscount); A Dissertation Upon Parties; In Several Letters to Caleb D'Anvers, Esq; The Eighth Edition. R. Francklin. London. 1754.

(Bolingbroke, H. St. John, Viscount); LETTERS, on the Spirit of PATRIOTISM: on the Idea of a PATRIOT KING: and On the STATE of PARTIES, At the Accession of King *GEORGE* the First. A. Millar. London. 1749.

Bolingbroke, H. St. John, Viscount; Letters and Correspondence, *Public and Private*, of the Right Honourable Henry St. John, Lord Visc. Bolingbroke; During the time he was Secretary of State to Queen Anne; with state papers, explanatory notes, and a translation of the foreign letters &c. By Gilbert Parke. G.G. and J. Robinson. London 1798.

Bolingbroke, H. St. John, Viscount; The Works of the Late Right Honourable Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke. With The Life of Lord Bolingbroke by Dr. Goldsmith, Now enlarged by more recent information relative to his public and personal character, selected from various authorities. A New Edition, In Eight Volumes. J. Johnson; Otridge and Son. London. 1809.

Cole, C.; MEMOIRS of AFFAIRS OF STATE: containing LETTERS, written by MINISTERS employed in foreign Negotiations, From the YEAR 1697, to the latter End of 1708. With TREATIES, MEMORIALS, and other TRANSACTIONS, mentioned in the said LETTERS. Published by CHRISTIAN COLE, Esq; Some time RESIDENT at VENICE. London. 1733.

Correspondance, Diplomatique et Militaire, du Duc de Marlborough, du Grand-Pensionnaire Heinsius et du Trésorier-Général des Provinces-Unies, Jacques Hop; J.F. Schleijer. Amsterdam. 1850.

Historical Manuscripts Commission. Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquis of Bath, preserved at Longleat, Wiltshire. His Majesty's Stationery Office. London/Hereford. Three Volumes. 1904-08.

Historical Manuscripts Commission. Report on the Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Portland, K.G., preserved at Welbeck Abbey. Her/His Majesty's Stationery Office. London/Norwich. Ten Volumes. 1891-1931.

Historical Manuscripts Commission. Report on the Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Rutland, K.G., preserved at Belvoir Castle. Her/His Majesty's Stationery Office. London. Four Volumes. 1888-1905.

Historical Manuscripts Commission. Report on the Manuscripts of the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, K.G., K.T., preserved at Montagu House, Whitehall. Her/His Majesty's Stationery Office. London. Three Volumes. 1899-1926.

Machiavelli, N.; The Discourses. trans. L.J. Walker. Penguin Books. London. 1998. (1970.)

Machiavelli, N.; The Prince. trans. G. Bull. Penguin Books. London. 1999. (1961.)

Maynwaring, A.; The LIFE and POSTHUMOUS WORKS of Arthur Maynwaring, Esq; containing Several Original Pieces and Translations, in Prose and Verse, never before Printed. To which are Added, Several Political Tracts written by him, before and after the Change of the Ministry. A. Bell. London. 1715.

Prior, M.; Some Memoirs of the Life and Publick Employments of Matthew Prior, Esq; with A Copy of his Last Will and Testament. Drawn up by Himself in the Year MDCCXXI. E. Curll. London. 1722.

Prior, M.; The HISTORY of His Own Time. Compiled from the ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS Of His late EXCELLENCY MATTHEW PRIOR Esq; Revised and Signed by Himself, and Copied fair for the Press by Mr. ADRIAN DRIFT, His Executor. Printed for the Editor. London. 1740.

Prior, M.; Verses Humbly presented to the King At His Arrival in Holland, After the Discovery of the late horrid Conspiracy Against His most Sacred Person. By Mr. Prior. Jacob Tonson. London. 1696.

Rowen, H.H. (Ed.); The Low Countries in Early Modern Times. Macmillan. London. 1972.

Snyder, H.L. (Ed.); The Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence. Oxford University Press. London. 1975.

Swift, J.; The Works of Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin, containing Additional Letters, Tracts, and Poems not hitherto published, With Notes and a Life of the Author by Sir Walter Scott. Second Ed. In Nineteen Volumes. Bickers and Son. London. 1888.

Torcy, J.-B. Colbert, Marquis de; MEMOIRS of the Marquis of TORCY, Secretary of State to LEWIS XIV. Containing the History of the Negotiations from the Treaty of RYSWICK to the Peace of UTRECHT. Translated from the FRENCH. P. Vaillant. London. 1757.

Wright and Spears (Eds.); The Literary Works of Matthew Prior. Second Ed. Oxford University Press. London. 1971.

### **Secondary Sources:**

Armitage, D. (Ed.); 'Introduction.' in Bolingbroke; Political Writings. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1997.

Armitage, D. (Ed.); 'Introduction.' in Grotius, H.; The Free Sea. trans. R. Hakluyt. Liberty Fund. Indianapolis. 2004.

Armitage, D.; The Ideological Origins of the British Empire. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge 2000.

Beddard, R. (Ed.); The Revolutions of 1688: The Andrew Browning Lectures, 1988. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 1991.

Bickley, F.; The Life of Matthew Prior. Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons Ltd. London. 1914.

Biddle, S.; Bolingbroke and Harley. George Allen and Unwin Ltd. London. 1975.

Bowle, J.; The Imperial Achievement: The Rise and Transformation of the British Empire. Martin Secker and Warburg Limited. London. 1974.

Brewer, J.; The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English state, 1688-1783. Unwin Hyman. London. 1989.

Canny, N. (Ed.); The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume I. The Origins of Empire. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2001. (1998.)

- Aylmer, G.E.; 'Navy, State, Trade and Empire.'
- Braddick, M.J.; 'The English Government, War, Trade, and Settlement, 1625-1688.'
- Hair and Law; 'The English in Western Africa to 1700.'
- Israel, J.; 'The Emerging Empire: The Continental Perspective, 1650-1713.'
- Zahedieh, N.; 'Overseas Expansion and Trade in the Seventeenth Century.'

Churchill, W.S.; Marlborough: His Life and Times. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 2000. (1933-47.)

Clark, G.N.; The Later Stuarts, 1660-1714. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 1944. (1934.)



Colley and Goldie; 'The Principles and Practice of Eighteenth-Century Party.' in The Historical Journal. Vol. 22. No. 1. March 1979.

Colley, L.; In Defiance of Oligarchy: The Tory Party, 1714-60. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1982.

Davies, G.; The Early Stuarts, 1603-1660. Second Edition. Oxford University Press. London. 1959.

Elton, Lord G.; Imperial Commonwealth. Collins. London. 1945.

Eves, C.K.; Matthew Prior: Poet and Diplomatist. Columbia University Press. New York. 1939.

Feiling, K.; A History of the Tory Party, 1640-1714. Oxford University Press. London. 1959. (1924.)

Goldie, M.; 'Edmund Bohun and *Jus Gentium* in the Revolution Debate, 1689-1693.' in The Historical Journal. Vol. 20. No. 3. Sept. 1977.

Holmes, G.; British Politics in the Age of Anne. Revised Edition. The Hambledon Press. London. 1987. (1967.)

Hoppit, J.; A Land of Liberty? England, 1689-1727. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2000.

Israel, J.I.; The Anglo-Dutch Moment. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1991.

Israel, J.I.; The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806. Clarendon Press. Oxford. 1995.

James, L.; The Rise and Fall of the British Empire. Abacus. London. 2001. (1994.)

Jarrett, D.; Britain, 1688-1815. Longmans Green and Co. Ltd. London. 1966. (1965.)

Jones, C. (Ed.); Britain in the First Age of Party, 1680-1750. The Hambledon Press. London. 1987.

Koehn, N.F.; The Power of Commerce: Economy and Governance in the First British Empire. Cornell University Press. Ithaca. 1994.

Lecky, W.E.H.; A History of England in the Eighteenth Century. Longmans Green and Co. London. 1888-90.

Legg, L.G.W.; Matthew Prior: A Study of His Public Career and Correspondence. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1921.

Mansfield, H.C.; Statesmanship and Party Government: A Study of Burke and Bolingbroke. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1965.

Marshall, P.J. (Ed.); The Oxford History of the British Empire. Volume II. The Eighteenth Century. Oxford University Press. Oxford. 2001. (1998.)

- Lenman, B.P.; 'Colonial Wars and Imperial Instability, 1688-1793.'
- O'Brien, P.K.; 'Inseparable Connections: Trade, Economy, Fiscal State, and the Expansion of Empire, 1688-1815.'
- Price, J.M.; 'The Imperial Economy, 1700-1776.'
- Rodger, N.A.M.; 'Sea-Power and Empire, 1688-1793.'

Merians, L.E.; Matthew Prior: A Biographical Study. University of Maryland. Ph.D. 1983. Unpublished. Sourced from University Microfilms International. Ann Arbor.

Plumb, J.H. The First Four Georges. Penguin Books. London. 2000. (1956.)

Plumb, J.H.; The Growth of Political Stability in England, 1675-1725. Penguin Books. London. Undated (based on lectures given in 1965.)

Rippy, F.M.; Matthew Prior. Twayne Publishers. Boston. 1986.

Schama, S.; The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age. Fontana Press. London. 1991.

Scott, J.; "'Good Night Amsterdam.'" Sir George Downing and Anglo-Dutch Statebuilding.' in The English Historical Review. Vol. 118. i. 476. April 2003.

Scott, J.; England's Troubles: Seventeenth-Century English Political Instability in European Context. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 2000.

Trevelyan, G.M.; The English Revolution, 1688-1689. Oxford University Press. London. 1963. (1938.)

Wilson, C.; Anglo-Dutch Commerce and Finance in the Eighteenth Century. Cambridge University Press. London. 1966. (1941.)