



## HISTORYMAKERS William of Orange

## Protestant Champion

"The Liberties of England and the Protestant Religion"—motto on the banners of William of Orange when he landed in England (1688)

Villiam of Orange belonged to the royal families of two of the main Protestant powers in 17th century Europe—the Netherlands and England. As a result, he devoted himself to preventing the growth of Catholic France. It was to further that goal that he gladly accepted the offer to become king of England in 1688.

William was born to the house of Orange, a family that had helped the Netherlands win independence in the 1500s. In 1672, France and England invaded this country and William, though only 22 years old, was put in command of its army. The Dutch military had long been neglected, and parts of the country were quickly overrun. In desperation, William ordered the destruction of the dikes, devices that prevented the sea from flowing onto land. By flooding parts of his country, he prevented the advance of the enemy armies.

William then boldly refused a peace offer from England and France. Determined to continue the fight, William worked on two fronts. He strengthened the army while using diplomatic skill to find allies. He won some victories and within a few years forced the French to retreat.

During this time, William married his cousin, Mary. Both were grandchildren of King Charles I of England, and both had a claim to the English throne.

Throughout the early 1680s, William continued his efforts to limit French power. He wanted to ensure the survival of the Netherlands and prevent French religious influence. France was a Catholic nation, and William was the leading Protestant power in Europe. He had hoped to forge an alliance between the Netherlands and England, but the English never agreed to one.

In 1685, James, Mary's father and a Catholic, became king of England. That change brought William new opportunities. English Protestants feared that James would make the country Catholic again. They thought they could use William as a way to stop James. Some hoped that James would remain childless and that William and Mary would produce a son. Their child could be named to follow James on the throne to ensure that England

would remain Protestant. Others talked about naming William as a regent to control James. William, who was still seeking an alliance against France, listened to their plans.

In 1688, however, James and his wife had a son, a Catholic heir. A group of Protestant leaders then invited William to come to England and become king immediately. Skillfully avoiding James's strong navy, William crossed the English Channel. He landed with an army of 15,000, declared that a new Parliament should be elected, and easily marched to London. James fled for Europe.

Even then, William and Mary's status was uncertain. Some said that Mary should rule and that William, who was foreign born, should not have any real power. Nevertheless, Mary insisted that they rule together, and they were crowned king and queen. However, Mary died only a few years later.

William ruled both England and the Netherlands until 1702. He spent much of these years leading armies. First, he had to end revolts in Scotland and Ireland. Later, he fought on the continent, continuing his long struggle against France. He had a new cause for war now because Louis XIV of France was trying to put James back on the English throne. In early 1702, William urged Parliament to form an alliance with the Netherlands against France. While the bill was being debated, William died. Nevertheless, Parliament approved his plan and declared war on France. Parliament added that for the war to end, France must recognize the Protestant succession in England.

## Questions

- Making Judgments Which of the ideas on William's banner do you think was more important to him? Why?
- 2. Perceiving Cause and Effect Why did the English turn to William in the struggle with James?
- 3. Using Context Clues What does succession mean and why was it important in England in this period?

