CHAPTER 9

James II

Parliament's failure to pass the Exclusion Bill in 1680 guaranteed the dynastic succession of James Stuart II of England and VII of Scotland in 1685. He was the first (and last) Catholic after the Reformation to become King of England and be crowned by the Protestant Archbishop of Canterbury. Francis Turner, Bishop of Ely, preached the coronation sermon emphasizing “the sanctity of the Stuart dynasty” and styling James “the Very Similitude and Picture of Charles the Martyr.” At the new king's request the communion service was eliminated from the ceremony.

For the moment dynastic succession had trumped confessional persuasion. In the long run, however, ceding to Roman Catholicism (even while protecting the established church) proved an unworkable strategy. Failing to conciliate parliament and amidst growing political tension, James fled from England in late December 1688. Prince William and Princess Mary of Orange (both grandchildren of Charles I), were invited to take the throne of England and, after acknowledging the Declaration of Rights and its statutory component, the Bill of Rights, presented to them in the banqueting hall on 13 February 1689, were declared king and queen of England.

James's two decorated royal letters to the tsars are explicit in request and one of them reveals a great deal about how he chose to represent himself and the crown to the tsar. Although he was not interested in furthering any relationship with the Russians he clearly supported the Jacobites in that country. These two letters are the swan song of our story.

We should bear in mind also that before assuming the crown in 1685 James Duke of York had been “a very considerable shareholder” in a number of joint stock companies of the Restoration period. Moreover, he was governor of the Royal Fishery Company, the Hudson's Bay Company, and the Royal Africa Company. By 1678 slave trade, the commerce of the Africa Company had “assumed a predominant position in England's trade with Africa and the

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1 Strong, Coronation, p. 340.
2 For the history of the Declaration and the succession, see Schwoerer, Declaration of Rights. William III was the posthumous son of William II of Orange and Mary, daughter of Charles I; Mary II was the daughter of Anne Hyde and James II, although she was brought up a Protestant. See ODNB.
3 Callow, Making of King James II, p. 238.
Caribbean” and fed the expanding plantations of the Carolinas.\footnote{Ibid., p. 243.} Whatever else these connections indicate they underscore the fact that the ultimate focus of James’s interest was west and south rather than east and north. Russia could not compete.

The two decorated letters from the reign of James II are to the Tsars Ivan V (ruled 1682–1696) and Peter I (ruled 1682–1725). The first, written in 1686, was in support of Patrick Gordon’s request for license to return to Scotland with “his wife, children, family and effects” to meet responsibilities regarding his inheritance. Gordon, a Scotsman, well entrenched in Russian court circles, was denied license to leave and continued his position there as a military advisor to the tsar and unofficial spokesman for the Jacobite cause. This letter is unique in that in the title the words “King of Scotland” precede those of “King of England,” giving preeminence to James’s Scottish crown and credence to Gordon’s proximity to James.\footnote{Regarding Gordon and the Jacobites, see P. Dukes, G. Herd, J. Kotilaine, Stuart and Romanovs, pp. 62–63; Cruickshanks and Corp, Stuart Court in Exile and the Jacobites, p. ix.} (James II \[1\].)

Some years later, in 1690, Patrick claimed to the duke of Gordon, his cousin in Scotland, that “I have got this Court [of the Tsar] still to owne his sacred majesty,” i.e., James Stuart, in exile from England until his death in 1701. Referring to William III, Patrick wrote in his diary in 1696 that he refused to drink to “the usurpator of Great Brittaine.”\footnote{Diary of Patrick Gordon, Moscow, Russian State Archive of Military History (RGVIA), fond 846, OP 15, no. 5, f. 59; Ibid., no. 6, f. 25v (Vol. VI, Diary of General Patrick Gordon of Auchleuchries 1635–1699, ed. Dmitry Fedosov, forthcoming).}

The second letter signals again the English crown’s dwindling interest in relations with Russia and sounds the death knell for frequent exchanges in announcing that hereafter all ministers of the tsar coming to the English court “are to live and maintayne themselves and their Attendants and Servants upon their own Expense,” and likewise Englishmen in Russia would thereafter not depend on the tsar for subsistence and upkeep. In the past those expenses had been generally paid by the Muscovy Company but now that Company, as we have said, was in serious financial trouble, never having had its privileges restored after 1649. In England in 1698 it would lose its monopoly of Russian trade, a further deflation of its place in the changing commercial world.

William and Mary had little connection with Russia but rather followed the westward and southward thrust of interest that began in earnest after Cromwell’s naval triumphs in the Caribbean, increased with Charles II’s plantation building and rice growing in the Carolinas, and was ultimately embraced...