History of the United Netherlands from the Death of William the Silent to the Twelve Year's Truce, 1584-85a eBook

History of the United Netherlands from the Death of William the Silent to the Twelve Year's Truce, 1584-85a by John Lothrop Motley

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HISTORY OF THE UNITED NETHERLANDS From the Death of William the Silent to the Twelve Year's Truce—1609

By John Lothrop Motley

MOTLEY'S HISTORY OF THE NETHERLANDS, Project Gutenberg Edition, Volume 38

History of The United Netherlands, 1584-1585

CHAPTER III.

Policy of England—Schemes of the Pretender of Portugal—Hesitation of the French Court—Secret Wishes of France—Contradictory Views as to the Opinions of Netherlanders—Their Love for England and Elizabeth—Prominent Statesmen of the Provinces—Roger Williams the Welshman Views of Walsingham, Burghley, and the Queen—An Embassy to Holland decided upon—Davison at the Hague—Cautious and Secret Measures of Burghley—Consequent Dissatisfaction of Walsingham— English and Dutch Suspicion of France—Increasing Affection of Holland for England.

The policy of England towards the Provinces had been somewhat hesitating, but it had not been disloyal. It was almost inevitable that there should be timidity in the councils of

Elizabeth, when so grave a question as that of confronting the vast power of Spain was forcing itself day by day more distinctly upon the consideration of herself and her statesmen. It was very clear, now that Orange was dead, that some new and decided step would be taken. Elizabeth was in favour of combined action by the French and English governments, in behalf of the Netherlands—a joint protectorate of the Provinces, until such time as adequate concessions on the religious question could be obtained from Spain. She was unwilling to plunge into the peril and expense of a war with the strongest power in the world. She disliked the necessity under which she should be placed of making repeated applications to her parliament, and of thus fostering the political importance of the Commons; she was reluctant to encourage rebellious subjects in another land, however just the cause of their revolt. She felt herself vulnerable in Ireland and on the Scottish border. Nevertheless, the Spanish power was becoming so preponderant, that if the Netherlands were conquered, she could never feel a moment's security within her own territory. If the Provinces were annexed to France, on the other hand, she could not contemplate with complacency the increased power thus placed in the hands of the treacherous and jesuitical house of Valois.

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The path of the Queen was thickly strewed with peril: her advisers were shrewd, far-seeing, patriotic, but some of them were perhaps over cautious. The time had, however, arrived when the danger was to be faced, if the whole balance of power in Europe were not to come to an end, and weak states, like England and the Netherlands, to submit to the tyranny of an overwhelming absolutism. The instinct of the English sovereign, of English statesmen, of the English nation, taught them that the cause of the Netherlands was their own. Nevertheless, they were inclined to look on yet a little longer, although the part of spectator had become an impossible one. The policy of the English government was not treacherous, although it was timid. That of the French court was both the one and the other, and it would have been better both for England and the Provinces, had they more justly appreciated the character of Catharine de' Medici and her son.

The first covert negotiations between Henry and the States had caused much anxiety among the foreign envoys in France. Don Bernardino de Mendoza, who had recently returned from Spain after his compulsory retreat from his post of English ambassador, was now established in Paris, as representative of Philip. He succeeded Tasais—a Netherlander by birth, and one of the ablest diplomatists in the Spanish service—and his house soon became the focus of intrigue against the government to which he was accredited—the very head-quarters of the League. His salary was large, his way of living magnificent, his insolence intolerable.

"Tassis is gone to the Netherlands," wrote envoy Busbecq to the Emperor, "and thence is to proceed to Spain. Don Bernardino has arrived in his place. If it be the duty of a good ambassador to expend largely, it would be difficult to find a better one than he; for they say 'tis his intention to spend sixteen thousand dollars yearly in his embassy. I would that all things were in correspondence; and that he were not in other respects so inferior to Tassis."

It is, however, very certain that Mendoza was not only a brave soldier, but a man of very considerable capacity in civil affairs, although his inordinate arrogance interfered most seriously with his skill as a negotiator. He was, of course, watching with much fierceness the progress of these underhand proceedings between the French court and the rebellious subjects of his master, and using threats and expostulations in great profusion. "Mucio," too, the great stipendiary of Philip, was becoming daily more dangerous, and the adherents of the League were multiplying with great celerity.

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The pretender of Portugal, Don Antonio, prior of Crato, was also in Paris; and it was the policy of both the French and the English governments to protect his person, and to make use of him as a rod over the head of Philip. Having escaped, after the most severe sufferings, in the mountains of Spain, where he had been tracked like a wild beast, with a price of thirty thousand crowns placed upon his head, he was now most anxious to stir the governments of Europe into espousing his cause, and into attacking Spain through the recently acquired kingdom of Portugal. Meantime, he was very desirous of some active employment, to keep himself from starving, and conceived the notion, that it would be an excellent thing for the Netherlands and himself, were he to make good to them the loss of William the Silent.

“Don Antonio,” wrote Stafford, “made a motion to me yesterday, to move her Majesty, that now upon the Prince of Orange’s death, as it is a necessary thing for them to have a governor and head, and him to be at her Majesty’s devotion, if her Majesty would be at the means to work it for him, she should be assured nobody should be more faithfully tied in devotion to her than he. Truly you would pity the poor man’s case, who is almost next door to starving in effect.”

A starving condition being, however, not the only requisite in a governor and head to replace the Prince of Orange, nothing came of this motion. Don Antonio remained in Paris, in a pitiable plight, and very much environed by dangers; for the Duke of Guise and his brother had undertaken to deliver him into the hands of Philip the Second, or those of his ministers, before the feast of St. John of the coming year. Fifty thousand dollars were to be the reward of this piece of work, combined with other services; “and the sooner they set about it the better,” said Philip, writing a few months later, “for the longer they delay it, the less easy will they find it."’

The money was never earned, however, and meantime Don Antonio made himself as useful as he could, in picking up information for Sir Edward Stafford and the other opponents of Spanish policy in Paris.

The English envoy was much embarrassed by the position of affairs. He felt sure that the French monarch would never dare to enter the lists against the king of Spain, yet he was accurately informed of the secret negotiations with the Netherlands, while in the dark as to the ultimate intentions of his own government.

“I was never set to school so much,” he wrote to Walsingham (27th July, 1584), “as I have been to decipher the cause of the deputies of the Low Countries coming hither, the offers that they made the King here, and the King’s manner of dealing with them!”

He expressed great jealousy at the mystery which enveloped the whole transaction; and much annoyance with Noel de Caron, who “kept very secret, and was angry at the motion,” when he endeavoured to discover the business in which they were engaged.

Yet he had the magnanimity to request Walsingham not to mention the fact to the Queen, lest she should be thereby prejudiced against the States.

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“For my part,” said he, “I would be glad in any thing to further them, rather than to hinder them—though they do not deserve it—yet for the good the helping them at this time may bring ourselves.”

Meantime, the deputies went away from France, and the King went to Lyons, where he had hoped to meet both the Duke of Savoy and the King of Navarre. But Joyeuse, who had been received at Chambery with “great triumphs and tourneys,” brought back only a broken wrist, without bringing the Duke of Savoy; that potentate sending word that the “King of Spain had done him the honour to give him his daughter, and that it was not fit for him to do any thing that might bring jealousy.”

Henry of Navarre also, as we have seen, declined the invitation sent him, M. de Segur not feeling disposed for the sudden flight out of window suggested by Agrippa D’ Aubigne; so that, on the whole, the King and his mother, with all the court, returned from Lyons in marvellous ill humour.

“The King storms greatly,” said Stafford, “and is in a great dump.” It was less practicable than ever to discover the intentions of the government; for although it was now very certain that active exertions were making by Des Pruneaux in the Provinces, it was not believed by the most sagacious that a serious resolution against Spain had been taken in France. There was even a talk of a double matrimonial alliance, at that very moment, between the two courts.

“It is for certain here said,” wrote Stafford, “that the King of Spain doth presently marry the dowager of France, and ’tis thought that if the King of Spain marry, he will not live a year. Whensoever the marriage be,” added the envoy, “I would to God the effect were true, for if it be not by some such handy work of God, I am afraid things will not go so well as I could wish.”

There was a lull on the surface of affairs, and it was not easy to sound the depths of unseen combinations and intrigues.

There was also considerable delay in the appointment and the arrival of the new deputies from the Netherlands; and Stafford was as doubtful as ever as to the intentions of his own government.

“They look daily here for the States,” he wrote to Walsingham (29th Dec. 1584), “and I pray that I may hear from you as soon as you may, what course I shall take when they be here, either hot or cold or lukewarm in the matter, and in what sort I shall behave myself. Some badly affected have gone about to put into the King’s head, that they never meant to offer the sovereignty, which, though the King be not thoroughly persuaded of, yet so much is won by this means that the King hearkeneth to see the end, and then to believe as he seeth cause, and in the meantime to speak no more of any such matter than if it had never been moved.”

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While his Majesty was thus hearkening in order to see more, according to Sir Edward's somewhat Hibernian mode of expressing himself, and keeping silent that he might see the better, it was more difficult than ever for the envoy to know what course to pursue. Some persons went so far as to suggest that the whole negotiation was a mere phantasmagoria devised by Queen Elizabeth—her purpose being to breed a quarrel between Henry and Philip for her own benefit; and "then, seeing them together by the ears, as her accustomed manner was, to let them go alone, and sit still to look on."

The King did not appear to be much affected by these insinuations against Elizabeth; but the doubt and the delay were very harrassing. "I would to God," wrote the English envoy, "that if the States mean to do anything here with the King, and if her. Majesty and the council think it fit, they would delay no time, but go roundly either to an agreement or to a breach with the King. Otherwise, as the matter now sleepeth, so it will die, for the King must be taken in his humour when he begins to nibble at any bait, for else he will come away, and never bite a full bite while he liveth."

There is no doubt that the bait, at which Henry nibbled with much avidity, was the maritime part of the Netherlands. Holland and Zeeland in the possession of either England or Spain, was a perpetual inconvenience to France. The King, or rather the Queen-Mother and her advisers—for Henry himself hardly indulged in any profound reflections. on state-affairs,—desired and had made a sine qua non of those Provinces. It had been the French policy, from the beginning, to delay matters, in order to make the States feel the peril of their position to the full.

"The King, differing and temporising," wrote Herle to the Queen, "would have them fall into that necessity and danger, as that they should offer unto him simply the possession of all their estates. Otherwise, they were to see, as in a glass, their evident and hasty ruin."

Even before the death of Orange, Henry had been determined, if possible, to obtain possession of the island of Walcheren, which controlled the whole country. "To give him that," said Herle, "would be to turn the hot end of the poker towards themselves, and put the cold part in the King's hand. He had accordingly made a secret offer to William of Orange, through the Princess, of two millions of livres in ready money, or, if he preferred it, one hundred thousand livres yearly of perpetual inheritance, if he would secure to him the island of Walcheren. In that case he promised to declare war upon the King of Spain, to confirm to the States their privileges, and to guarantee to the Prince the earldoms of Holland and Zeeland, with all his other lands and titles."

It is superfluous to say that such offers were only regarded by the Prince as an affront. It was, however, so necessary, in his opinion; to maintain the cause of the reformed churches in France, and to keep up the antagonism between that country and Spain, that the French policy was not abandoned, although the court was always held in suspicion.

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But on the death of William, there was a strong reaction against France and in favour of England. Paul Buys, one of the ablest statesmen of the Netherlands, Advocate of Holland, and a confidential friend of William the Silent up to the time of his death, now became the leader of the English party, and employed his most strenuous efforts against the French treaty-having “seen the scope of that court.”

With regard to the other leading personages, there was a strong inclination in favour of Queen Elizabeth, whose commanding character inspired great respect. At the same time warmer sentiments of adhesion seem to have been expressed towards the French court, by the same individuals, than the, mere language of compliment justified.

Thus, the widowed Princess of Orange was described by Des Pruneaux to his sovereign, as “very desolate, but nevertheless doing all in her power to advance his interests; the Count Maurice, of gentle hopes, as also most desirous of remaining his Majesty’s humble servant, while Elector Truchsess was said to be employing himself, in the same cause, with very great affection.”

A French statesman resident in the Provinces, whose name has not been preserved, but who was evidently on intimate terms with many eminent Netherlanders, declared that Maurice, “who had a mind entirely French, deplored infinitely the misfortunes of France, and regretted that all the Provinces could not be annexed to so fair a kingdom. I do assure you,” he added, “that he is in no wise English.”

Of Count Hohenlo, general-in-chief of the States’ army under Prince Maurice, and afterwards his brother-in-law, the same gentleman spoke with even greater confidence. “Count d’Oloc,” said he (for by that ridiculous transformation of his name the German general was known to French and English), “with whom I have passed three weeks on board the fleet of the States, is now wholly French, and does not love the English at all. The very first time I saw him, he protested twice or thrice, in presence of members of the States General and of the State Council, that if he had no Frenchmen he could never carry on the war. He made more account,” he said, “of two thousand French than of six thousand others, English, or Germans.”

Yet all these distinguished persons—the widowed Princess of Orange, Count Maurice, ex-elector Truchsess, Count Holenlo—were described to Queen Elizabeth by her confidential agent, then employed in the Provinces, as entirely at that sovereign’s devotion.

“Count Maurice holds nothing of the French, nor esteems them,” said Herle, “but humbly desired me to signify unto your Majesty that he had in his mind and determination faithfully vowed his service to your Majesty, which should be continued in his actions with all duty, and sealed with his blood; for he knew how much his father and the cause were beholden ever to your Highness’s goodness.”

The Princess, together with her sister-in-law Countess Schwartzenburg, and the young daughters of the late Prince were described on the same occasion “as recommending their service unto her Majesty with a most tender affection, as to a lady of all ladies.” “Especially,” said Herle, “did the two Princesses in most humble and wise sort, express a certain fervent devotion towards your Majesty.”

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Elector Truchsess was spoken of as “a prince well qualified and greatly devoted to her Majesty; who, after many grave and sincere words had of her Majesty’s virtue, calling her ’la fille unique de Dieu, and le bien heureuse Princesse’, desired of God that he might do her service as she merited.”

And, finally, Count Hollock—who seemed to “be reformed in sundry things, if it hold” (a delicate allusion to the Count’s propensity for strong potations), was said “to desire humbly to be known for one that would obey the commandment of her Majesty more than of any earthly prince living besides.”

There can be no doubt that there was a strong party in favour of an appeal to England rather than to France. The Netherlanders were too shrewd a people not to recognize the difference between the king of a great realm, who painted his face and wore satin petticoats, and the woman who entertained ambassadors, each in his own language, on gravest affairs of state, who matched in her wit and wisdom the deepest or the most sparkling intellects of her council, who made extemporaneous Latin orations to her universities, and who rode on horseback among her generals along the lines of her troops in battle-array, and yet was only the unmarried queen of a petty and turbulent state.

“The reverend respect that is borne to your Majesty throughout these countries is great,” said William Herle. They would have thrown themselves into her arms, heart and soul, had they been cordially extended at that moment of their distress; but she was coy, hesitating, and, for reasons already sufficiently indicated, although not so conclusive as they seemed, disposed to temporize and to await the issue of the negotiations between the Provinces and France.

In Holland and Zeeland especially, there was an enthusiastic feeling in favour of the English alliance. “They recommend themselves,” said Herleo “throughout the country in their consultations and assemblies, as also in their common and private speeches, to the Queen of England’s only favour and goodness, whom they call their saviour, and the Princess of greatest perfection in wisdom and sincerity that ever governed. Notwithstanding their treaty now on foot by their deputies with France, they are not more disposed to be governed by the French than to be tyrannized over by the Spaniard; concluding it to be alike; and even ’commutare non sortem sed servitutem’.”

Paul Buys was indefatigable in his exertions against the treaty with France, and in stimulating the enthusiasm for England and Elizabeth. He expressed sincere and unaffected devotion to the Queen on all occasions, and promised that no negotiations should take place, however secret and confidential, that were not laid before her Majesty. “He has the chief administration among the States,” said Herle, “and to his credit and dexterity they attribute the despatch of most things. He showed unto me the state of the enemy throughout the provinces, and of the negotiation in France, whereof

he had no opinion at all of success, nor any will of his own part but to please the Prince of Orange in his life-time."

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It will be seen in the sequel whether or not the views of this experienced and able statesman were lucid and comprehensive. It will also be seen whether his strenuous exertions in favour of the English alliance were rewarded as bountifully as they deserved, by those most indebted to him.

Meantime he was busily employed in making the English government acquainted with the capacity, disposition, and general plans of the Netherlanders.

“They have certain other things in consultation amongst the States to determine of,” wrote Herle, “which they were sworn not to reveal to any, but Buys protested that nothing should pass but to your liking and surety, and the same to be altered and disposed as should seem good to your Highness’s own authority; affirming to me sincerely that Holland and Zeeland, with the rest of the provinces, for the estimation they had of your high virtue and temperancy, would yield themselves absolutely to your Majesty and crown for ever, or to none other (their liberties only reserved), whereof you should have immediate possession, without reservation of place or privilege.”

The important point of the capability of the Provinces to defend themselves, about which Elizabeth was most anxious to be informed, was also fully elucidated by the Advocate. “The means should be such, proceeding from the Provinces,” said he, “as your Majesty might defend your interest therein with facility against the whole world.” He then indicated a plan, which had been proposed by the States of Brabant to the States General, according to which they were to keep on foot an army of 15,000 foot and 5000 horse, with which they should be able, “to expulse the enemy and to reconquer their towns and country lost, within three months.” Of this army they hoped to induce the Queen to furnish 5000 English footmen and 500 horse, to be paid monthly by a treasurer of her own; and for the assistance thus to be furnished they proposed to give Ostend and Sluys as pledge of payment. According to this scheme the elector palatine, John Casimir, had promised to furnish, equip, and pay 2000 cavalry, taking the town of Maestricht and the country of Limburg, when freed from the enemy, in pawn for his disbursements; while Antwerp and Brabant had agreed to supply 300,000 crowns in ready money for immediate use. Many powerful politicians opposed this policy, however, and urged reliance upon France, “so that this course seemed to be lame in many parts.”—[Letter of Herle].

Agents had already been sent both to England and France, to procure, if possible, a levy of troops for immediate necessity. The attempt was unsuccessful in France, but the Dutch community of the reformed religion in London subscribed nine thousand and five florins. This sum, with other contributions, proved sufficient to set Morgan’s regiment on foot, which soon after began to arrive in the Netherlands by companies. “But if it were all here at once,” said Stephen Le Sieur, “’t would be but a breakfast for the enemy.”

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The agent for the matter in England was De Griyse, formerly bailiff of Bruges; and although tolerably successful in his mission, he was not thought competent for so important a post, nor officially authorised for the undertaking. While procuring this assistance in English troops he had been very urgent with the Queen to further the negotiations between the States and France; and Paul Buys was offended with him as a mischief-maker and an intriguer. He complained of him as having “thrust himself in, to deal and intermeddle in the affairs of the Low Countries unavowed,” and desired that he might be closely looked after.

After the Advocate, the next most important statesman in the provinces was, perhaps, Meetkerk, President of the High Court of Flanders, a man of much learning, sincerity, and earnestness of character; having had great experience in the diplomatic service of the country on many important occasions. “He stands second in reputation here,” said Herle, “and both Buys and he have one special care in all practises that are discovered, to examine how near anything may concern your person or kingdom, whereof they will advertise as matter shall fall out in importance.”

John van Olden-Barneveldt, afterwards so conspicuous in the history of the country, was rather inclined, at this period, to favour the French party; a policy which was strenuously furthered by Villiers and by Sainte Aldegonde.

Besides the information furnished to the English government, as to the state of feeling and resources of the Netherlands, by Buys, Meetkerk, and William Herle, Walsingham relied much upon the experienced eye and the keen biting humour of Roger Williams.

A frank open-hearted Welshman, with no fortune but his sword, but as true as its steel, he had done the States much important service in the hard-fighting days of Grand Commander Requesens and of Don John of Austria. With a shrewd Welsh head under his iron morion, and a stout Welsh heart under his tawny doublet, he had gained little but hard knocks and a dozen wounds in his campaigning, and had but recently been ransomed, rather grudgingly by his government, from a Spanish prison in Brabant. He was suffering in health from its effects, but was still more distressed in mind, from his sagacious reading of the signs of the times. Fearing that England was growing lukewarm, and the Provinces desperate, he was beginning to find himself out of work, and was already casting about him for other employment. Poor, honest, and proud, he had repeatedly declined to enter the Spanish service. Bribes, such as at a little later period were sufficient to sully conspicuous reputations and noble names, among his countrymen in better circumstances than his own, had been freely but unsuccessfully offered him. To serve under any but the English or States’ flag in the Provinces he scorned; and he thought the opportunity fast slipping away there for taking the Papistical party in Europe handsomely by the beard. He had done much manful work in the Netherlands, and was destined to do much more; but he was now discontented, and thought himself slighted. In more remote regions of the world, the, thrifty soldier thought

that there might be as good harvesting for his sword as in the thrice-trampled stubble of Flanders.

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“I would refuse no hazard that is possible to be done in the Queen’s service,” he said to Walsingham; “but I do persuade myself she makes no account of me. Had it not been for the duty that nature bound me towards her and my country, I needed not to have been in that case that I am in. Perhaps I could have fingered more pistoles than Mr. Newell, the late Latiner, and had better usage and pension of the Spaniards than he. Some can tell that I refused large offers, in the misery of Alost, of the Prince of Parma. Last of all, Verdugo offered me very fair, being in Loccum, to quit the States’ service, and accept theirs, without treachery or betraying of place or man.”

Not feeling inclined to teach Latin in Spain, like the late Mr. Newell, or to violate oaths and surrender fortresses, like brave soldiers of fortune whose deeds will be afterwards chronicled, he was disposed to cultivate the “acquaintance of divers Pollacks,” from which he had received invitations. “Find I nothing there,” said he, “Duke Matthias has promised me courtesy if I would serve in Hungary. If not, I will offer service to one of the Turk’s bashaws against the Persians.”

Fortunately, work was found for the trusty Welshman in the old fields. His brave honest face often reappeared; his sharp sensible tongue uttered much sage counsel; and his ready sword did various solid service, in leaguer, battle-field, and martial debate, in Flanders, Holland, Spain, and France.

For the present, he was casting his keen glances upon the negotiations in progress, and cavilling at the general policy which seemed predominant.

He believed that the object of the French was to trifle with the States, to protract interminably their negotiations, to prevent the English government from getting any hold upon the Provinces, and then to leave them to their fate.

He advised Walsingham to advance men and money, upon the security of Sluys and Ostend.

“I dare venture my life,” said he, with much energy, “that were Norris, Bingham, Yorke, or Carlisle, in those ports, he would keep them during the Spanish King’s life.”

But the true way to attack Spain—a method soon afterwards to be carried into such brilliant effect by the naval heroes of England and the Netherlands—the long-sighted Welshman now indicated; a combined attack, namely, by sea upon the colonial possessions of Philip.

“I dare be bound,” said he, “if you join with Treslong, the States Admiral, and send off, both, three-score sail into his Indies, we will force him to retire from conquering further, and to be contented to let other princes live as well as he.”

In particular, Williams urged rapid action, and there is little doubt, that had the counsels of prompt, quick-witted, ready-handed soldiers like himself, and those who thought with him, been taken; had the stealthy but quick-darting policy of Walsingham prevailed over the solemn and stately but somewhat ponderous proceedings of Burghley, both Ghent and Antwerp might have been saved, the trifling and treacherous diplomacy of Catharine de' Medici neutralized, and an altogether more fortunate aspect given at once to the state of Protestant affairs.

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“If you mean to do anything,” said he, “it is more than time now. If you will send some man of credit about it, will it please your honour, I will go with him, because I know the humour of the people, and am acquainted with a number of the best. I shall be able to show him a number of their dealings, as well with the French as in other affairs, and perhaps will find means to send messengers to Ghent, and to other places, better than the States; for the message of one soldier is better than twenty boors.”

It was ultimately decided—as will soon be related—to send a man of credit to the Provinces. Meantime, the policy of England continued to be expectant and dilatory, and Advocate Buys, after having in vain attempted to conquer the French influence, and bring about the annexation of the Provinces to England, threw down his office in disgust, and retired for a time from the contest. He even contemplated for a moment taking service in Denmark, but renounced the notion of abandoning his country, and he will accordingly be found, at a later period, conspicuous in public affairs.

The deliberations in the English councils were grave and anxious, for it became daily more obvious that the Netherland question was the hinge upon which the, whole fate of Christendom was slowly turning. To allow the provinces to fall back again into the grasp of Philip, was to offer England herself as a last sacrifice to the Spanish Inquisition. This was felt by all the statesmen in the land; but some of them, more than the rest, had a vivid perception of the danger, and of the necessity of dealing with it at once.

To the prophetic eye of Walsingham, the mists of the future at times were lifted; and the countless sails of the invincible Armada, wafting defiance and destruction to England, became dimly visible. He felt that the great Netherland bulwark of Protestantism and liberty was to be defended at all hazards, and that the death-grapple could not long be deferred.

Burghley, deeply pondering, but less determined, was still disposed to look on and to temporize.

The Queen, far-seeing and anxious, but somewhat hesitating, still clung to the idea of a joint protectorate. She knew that the reestablishment of Spanish authority in the Low Countries would be fatal to England, but she was not yet prepared to throw down the gauntlet to Philip. She felt that the proposed annexation of the Provinces to France would be almost as formidable; yet she could not resolve, frankly and fearlessly, to assume, the burthen of their protection. Under the inspiration of Burghley, she was therefore willing to encourage the Netherlanders underhand; preventing them at every hazard from slackening in their determined hostility to Spain; discountenancing, without absolutely forbidding, their proposed absorption by France; intimating, without promising, an ultimate and effectual assistance from herself. Meantime, with something of feline and feminine duplicity, by which the sex of the great sovereign would so often manifest itself in the most momentous affairs, she would watch and wait, teasing the

Provinces, dallying with the danger, not quite prepared as yet to abandon the prize to Henry or Philip, or to seize it herself.

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The situation was rapidly tending to become an impossible one.

Late in October a grave conference was held council, “upon the question whether her Majesty should presently relieve the States of the Low Countries.”

It was shown, upon one side, that the “perils to the Queen and to the realm were great, if the King of Spain should recover Holland and Zeeland, as he had the other countries, for lack of succour in seasonable time, either by the French King or the Queen’s Majesty.”

On the other side, the great difficulties in the way of effectual assistance by England, were “fully remembered.”

“But in the end, and upon comparison made,” said Lord Burghley, summing up, “betwixt the perils on the one part, and the difficulties on the other,” it was concluded that the Queen would be obliged to succumb to the power of Spain, and the liberties of England be hopelessly lost, if Philip were then allowed to carry out his designs, and if the Provinces should be left without succour at his mercy.

A “wise person” was accordingly to be sent into Holland; first, to ascertain whether the Provinces had come to an actual agreement with the King of France, and, if such should prove to be the case, to enquire whether that sovereign had pledged himself to declare war upon Philip. In this event, the wise person was to express her Majesty’s satisfaction that the Provinces were thus to be “relieved from the tyranny of the King of Spain.”

On the other hand, if it should appear that no such conclusive arrangements had been made, and that the Provinces were likely to fall again victims to the “Spanish tyranny,” her Majesty would then “strain herself as far as, with preservation of her own estate, she might, to succour them at this time.”

The agent was then to ascertain “what conditions the Provinces would require” upon the matter of succour, and, if the terms seemed reasonable, he would assure them that “they should not be left to the cruelties of the Spaniards.”

And further, the wise person, “being pressed to answer, might by conference of speeches and persuasions provoke them to offer to the Queen the ports of Flushing and Middelburg and the Brill, wherein she meant not to claim any property, but to hold them as gages for her expenses, and for performances of their covenants.”

He was also to make minute inquiries as to the pecuniary resources of the Provinces, the monthly sums which they would be able to contribute, the number of troops and of ships of war that they would pledge themselves to maintain. These investigations were very important, because the Queen, although very well disposed to succour them, “so

nevertheless she was to consider how her power might be extended, without ruin or manifest peril to her own estate."

It was also resolved, in the same conference, that a preliminary step of great urgency was to "procure a good peace with the King of Scots." Whatever the expense of bringing about such a pacification might be, it was certain that a "great deal more would be expended in defending the realm against Scotland," while England was engaged in hostilities with Spain. Otherwise, it was argued that her Majesty would be "so impeached by Scotland in favour of the King of Spain, that her action against that King would be greatly weakened."

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Other measures necessary to be taken in view of the Spanish war were also discussed. The ex-elector of Cologne, “a man of great account in Germany,” was to be assisted with money to make head against his rival supported by the troops of Philip.

Duke Casimir of the Palatinate was to be solicited to make a diversion in Gelderland.

The King of France was to be reminded of his treaty with England for mutual assistance in case of the invasion by a foreign power of either realm, and to be informed “not only of the intentions of the Spaniards to invade England, upon their conquest of the Netherlands, but of their actual invasion of Ireland.”

It was “to be devised how the King of Navarre and Don Antonio of Portugal, for their respective titles, might be induced to offend and occupy the King of Spain, whereby to diminish his forces bent upon the Low Countries.”

It was also decided that Parliament should be immediately summoned, in which, besides the request of a subsidy, many other necessary, provisions should be made for her Majesty’s safety.

“The conclusions of the whole,” said Lord Burghley, with much earnestness, “was this. Although her Majesty should hereby enter into a war presently, yet were she better to do it now, while she may make the same out of her realm, having the help of the people of Holland, and before the King of Spain shall have consummated his conquests in those countries, whereby he shall be so provoked with pride, solicited by the Pope, and tempted by the Queen’s own subjects, and shall be so strong by sea, and so free from all other actions and quarrels,—yea, shall be so formidable to all the rest of Christendom, as that her Majesty shall no wise be able, with her own power, nor with aid of any other, neither by sea nor land, to withstand his attempts, but shall be forced to give place to his insatiable malice, which is most terrible to be thought of, but miserable to suffer.”

Thus did the Lord Treasurer wisely, eloquently, and well, describe the danger by which England was environed. Through the shield of Holland the spear was aimed full at the heart of England. But was it a moment to linger? Was that buckler to be suffered to fall to the ground, or to be raised only upon the arm of a doubtful and treacherous friend? Was it an hour when the protection of Protestantism and of European liberty against Spain was to be entrusted to the hand of a feeble and priest-ridden Valois? Was it wise to indulge any longer in doubtings and dreamings, and in yet a little more folding of the arms to sleep, while that insatiable malice, so terrible to be thought of, so miserable to feel, was bowing hourly more formidable, and approaching nearer and nearer?

Early in December, William Davison, gentleman-in-ordinary of her Majesty’s household, arrived at the Hague; a man painstaking, earnest, and zealous, but who was fated, on

more than one great occasion, to be made a scape-goat for the delinquencies of greater personages than himself.

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He had audience of the States General on the 8th December. He then informed that body that the Queen had heard, with, sorrowful heart, of the great misfortunes which the United Provinces had sustained since the death of the Prince of Orange; the many cities which they had lost, and the disastrous aspect of the common cause. Moved by the affection which she had always borne the country, and anxious for its preservation, she had ordered her ambassador Stafford to request the King of France to undertake, jointly with herself, the defence of the provinces against the king of Spain. Not till very lately, however, had that envoy succeeded in obtaining an audience, and he had then received "a very cold answer." It being obvious to her Majesty, therefore, that the French government intended to protract these matters indefinitely, Davison informed the States that she had commissioned him to offer them "all possible assistance, to enquire into the state of the country, and to investigate the proper means of making that assistance most useful." He accordingly requested the appointment of a committee to confer with him upon the subject; and declared that the Queen did not desire to make herself mistress of the Provinces, but only to be informed how she best could aid their cause.

A committee was accordingly appointed, and a long series of somewhat concealed negotiations was commenced. As the deputies were upon the eve of their departure for France, to offer the sovereignty of the Provinces to Henry, these proceedings were necessarily confused, dilatory, and at tines contradictory.

After the arrival of the deputies in France, the cunctative policy inspired by the Lord Treasurer was continued by England. The delusion of a joint protectorate was still clung to by the Queen, although the conduct of France was becoming very ambiguous, and suspicion growing darker as to the ultimate and secret purport of the negotiations in progress.

The anxiety and jealousy of Elizabeth were becoming keener than ever. If the offers to the King were unlimited; he would accept them, and would thus become as dangerous as Philip. If they were unsatisfactory, he would turn his back upon the Provinces, and leave them a prey to Philip. Still she would not yet renounce the hope of bringing the French King over to an ingenuous course of action. It was thought, too, that something might be done with the great malcontent nobles of Flanders, whose defection from the national cause had been so disastrous, but who had been much influenced in their course, it was thought, by their jealousy of William the Silent.

Now that the Prince was dead, it was thought probable that the Arschots, and Havres, Chimays, and Lalaings, might arouse themselves to more patriotic views than they had manifested when they espoused the cause of Spain.

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It would be desirable to excite their jealousy of French influence, and, at the same time, to inspire throughout the popular mind the fear of another tyranny almost as absolute as that of Spain. "And if it be objected," said Burghley, "that except they shall admit the French King to the absolute dominion, he will not aid them, and they, for lack of succour, be forced to yield to the Spaniard, it may be answered that rather than they should be wholly subjected to the French, or overcome by the Spaniard, her Majesty would yield unto them as much as, with preservation of her estate, and defence of her own country, might be demanded."

The real object kept in view by the Queen's government was, in short, to obtain for the Provinces and for the general cause of liberty the greatest possible amount of assistance from Henry, and to allow him to acquire in return the least possible amount of power. The end proposed was a reasonable one, but the means employed savoured too much of intrigue.

"It may be easily made probable to the States," said the Lord Treasurer, "that the government of the French is likely to prove as cumbersome and perilous as that of the Spaniards; and likewise it may probably be doubted how the French will keep touch and covenants with them, when any opportunity shall be offered to break them; so that her Majesty thinketh no good can be looked for to those countries by yielding this large authority to the French. If they shall continue their title by this grant to be absolute lords, there is no end, for a long time, to be expected of this war; and, contrariwise, if they break off, there is an end of any good composition with the King of Spain."

Shivering and shrinking, but still wading in deeper and deeper, inch by inch, the cautious minister was fast finding himself too far advanced to retreat. He was rarely decided, however, and never lucid; and least of all in emergencies, when decision and lucidity would have been more valuable than any other qualities.

Deeply doubting, painfully balancing, he at times drove the unfortunate Davison almost distraught. Puzzled himself and still more puzzling to others, he rarely permitted the Netherlanders, or even his own agents, to perceive his drift. It was fair enough, perhaps, to circumvent the French government by its own arts, but the Netherlanders meanwhile were in danger of sinking into despair.

"Thus," wrote the Lord Treasurer to the envoy, "I have discoursed to you of these uncertainties and difficulties, things not unknown to yourself, but now being imparted to you by her Majesty's commandment, you are, by your wisdom, to consider with whom to deal for the stay of this French course, and yet, so to use it (as near as you may) that they of the French faction there be not able to charge you therewith, by-advertising into France. For it hath already appeared, by some speeches past between our ambassador there and Des Pruneaux, that you are had in some jealousy as a hinderer of this French course, and at work for her Majesty to have some entrance and partage

in that country. Nevertheless our ambassador; by his answer, hath satisfied them to think the contrary."

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They must have been easily satisfied, if they knew as much of the dealings of her Majesty's government as the reader already knows. To inspire doubt of the French, to insinuate the probability of their not "keeping touch and covenant," to represent their rule as "cumbersome and perilous," was wholesome conduct enough towards the Netherlanders—and still more so, had it been accompanied with frank offers of assistance —but it was certainly somewhat to "hinder the courses of the French."

But in truth all parties were engaged for a season in a round game of deception, in which nobody was deceived.

Walsingham was impatient, almost indignant at this puerility. "Your doings, no doubt of it," he wrote to Davison, "are observed by the French faction, and therefore you cannot proceed so closely but it will be espied. Howsoever it be, seeing direction groweth from hence, we cannot but blame ourselves, if the effects thereof do not fall out to our liking."

That sagacious statesman was too well informed, and too much accustomed to penetrate the designs of his antagonists, to expect anything from the present intrigues.

To loiter thus, when mortal blows should be struck, was to give the Spanish government exactly that of which it was always most gluttonous— time; and the Netherlanders had none of it to spare. "With time and myself, there are two of us," was Philip II.'s favourite observation; and the Prince of Parma was at this moment sorely perplexed by the parsimony and the hesitations of his own government, by which his large, swift and most creative genius was so often hampered.

Thus the Spanish soldiers, deep in the trenches, went with bare legs and empty stomachs in January; and the Dutchmen, among their broken dykes, were up to their ears in mud and water; and German mercenaries, in the obedient Provinces, were burning the peasants' houses in order to sell the iron to buy food withal; while grave-visaged statesmen, in comfortable cabinets, wagged their long white beards at each other from a distance, and exchanged grimaces and protocols which nobody heeded.

Walsingham was weary of this solemn trifling. "I conclude," said he to Davison, "that her Majesty—with reverence be it spoken—is ill advised, to direct you in a course that is like to work so great peril. I know you will do your best endeavour to keep all things upright, and yet it is hard—the disease being now come to this state, or, as the physicians term it, crisis—to carry yourself in such sort, but that it will, I fear, breed a dangerous alteration in the cause."

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He denounced with impatience, almost with indignation, the insincerity and injustice of these intolerable hesitations. “Sorry am I,” said he, “to see the course that is taken in this weighty cause, for we will neither help those poor countries ourselves, nor yet suffer others to do it. I am not ignorant that in time to come the annexing of these countries to the crown of France may prove prejudicial to England, but if France refuse to deal with them, and the rather for that we shall minister some cause of impediment by a kind of dealing underhand, then shall they be forced to return into the hands of Spain, which is like to breed such a present peril towards her Majesty’s self, as never a wise man that seeth it, and loveth her, but lamenteth it from the bottom of his heart.”

Walsingham had made up his mind that it was England, not France, that should take up the cause of the Provinces, and defend them at every hazard. He had been overruled, and the Queen’s government had decided to watch the course of the French negotiation, doing what it could, underhand, to prevent that negotiation from being successful. The Secretary did not approve of this disingenuous course. At the same time he had no faith in the good intentions of the French court.

“I could wish,” said he, “that the French King were carried with that honourable mind into the defence of these countries that her Majesty is, but France has not been used to do things for God’s sake; neither do they mean to use our advice or assistance in making of the bargain. For they still hold a jealous conceit that when Spain and they are together by the ears, we will seek underhand to work our own peace.” Walsingham, therefore, earnestly deprecated the attitude provisionally maintained by England.

Meantime, early in January, (Jan. 3, 1585) the deputation from the Provinces had arrived in France. The progress of their 1585 negotiation will soon be related, but, before its result was known, a general dissatisfaction had already manifested itself in the Netherlands. The factitious enthusiasm which had been created in favour of France, as well as the prejudice against England, began to die out. It became probable in the opinion of those most accustomed to read the signs of the times, that the French court was acting in connivance with Philip, and that the negotiation was only intended to amuse the Netherlanders, to circumvent the English, and to gain time both for France and Spain. It was not believed that the character of Henry or the policy of his mother was likely to the cause of any substantial aid to the cause of civil liberty or Protestant principles.

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“They look for no better fruit from the commission to France,” wrote Davison, who surveyed the general state of affairs with much keenness and breadth of vision, “than a dallying entertainment of the time, neither leaving them utterly hopeless, nor at full liberty to seek for relief elsewhere, especially in England, or else some pleasing motion of peace, wherein the French King will offer his mediation with Spain. Meantime the people, wearied with the troubles, charges, and hazard of the war, shall be rocked asleep, the provision for their defence neglected, some Provinces nearest the danger seduced, the rest by their defection astonished, and the enemy by their decay and confusions, strengthened. This is the scope whereto the doings of the French King, not without intelligence with the Spanish sovereign, doth aim, whatever is pretended.”

There was a wide conviction that the French King was dealing falsely with the Provinces. It seemed certain that he must be inspired by intense jealousy of England, and that he was unlikely, for the sake of those whose “religion, popular liberty, and rebellion against their sovereign,” he could not but disapprove, to allow Queen Elizabeth to steal a march upon him, and “make her own market with Spain to his cost and disadvantage.”

In short, it was suspected—whether justly or not will be presently shown—that Henry III. “was seeking to blear the eyes of the world, as his brother Charles did before the Massacre of St. Bartholomew.” As the letters received from the Dutch envoys in France became less and less encouraging, and as the Queen was informed by her ambassador in Paris of the tergiversations in Paris, she became the more anxious lest the States should be driven to despair. She therefore wrote to Davison, instructing him “to nourish in them underhand some hope—as a thing proceeding from himself—that though France should reject them, yet she would not abandon them.”

He was directed to find out, by circuitous means, what towns they would offer to her as security for any advances she might be induced to make, and to ascertain the amount of monthly contributions towards the support of the war that they were still capable of furnishing. She was beginning to look with dismay at the expatriation of wealthy merchants and manufacturers going so rapidly forward, now that Ghent had fallen and Brussels and Antwerp were in such imminent peril. She feared that, while so much valuable time had been thrown away, the Provinces had become too much impoverished to do their own part in their own defence; and she was seriously alarmed at rumours which had become prevalent of a popular disposition towards treating for a peace at any price with Spain. It soon became evident that these rumours were utterly without foundation, but the other reasons for Elizabeth’s anxiety were sufficiently valid.

On the whole, the feeling in favour of England was rapidly gaining ground. In Holland especially there was general indignation against the French party. The letters of the deputies occasioned “murmur and mislike” of most persons, who noted them to contain “more ample report of ceremonies and compliments than solid argument of comfort.”

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Sir Edward Stafford, who looked with great penetration into the heart of the mysterious proceedings at Paris, assured his government that no better result was to be looked for, “after long dalliance and entertainment, than either a flat refusal or such a masked embracing of their cause, as would rather tend to the increasing of their miseries and confusion than relief for their declining estate.” While “reposing upon a broken reed,” they were, he thought, “neglecting other means more expedient for their necessities.”

This was already the universal opinion in Holland. Men now remembered, with bitterness, the treachery of the Duke of Anjou, which they had been striving so hard to forget, but which less than two years ago had nearly proved fatal to the cause of liberty in the Provinces. A committee of the States had an interview with the Queen’s envoy at the Hague; implored her Majesty through him not to abandon their cause; expressed unlimited regret for the course which had been pursued, and avowed a determination “to pluck their heads out of the collar,” so soon as the opportunity should offer.

They stated, moreover, that they had been directed by the assembly to lay before him the instructions for the envoys to France, and the articles proposed for the acceptance of the King. The envoy knew his business better than not to have secretly provided himself with copies of these documents, which he had already laid before his own government.

He affected, however, to feel hurt that he had been thus kept in ignorance of papers which he really knew by heart. “After some pretended quarrel,” said he, “for their not acquainting me therewith sooner, I did accept them, as if. I had before neither seen nor heard of them.”

This then was the aspect of affairs in the provinces during the absence of the deputies in France. It is now necessary to shift the scene to that country.

CHAPTER IV.

Reception of the Dutch Envoys at the Louvre—Ignominious Result of the Embassy—-Secret Influences at work—Bargaining between the French and Spanish Courts—-Claims of Catharine de’ Medici upon Portugal—Letters of Henry and Catharine—Secret Proposal by France to invade England—States’ Mission to Henry of Navarre—Subsidies of Philip to Guise—Treaty of Joinville—Philip’s Share in the League denied by Parma—-Philip in reality its Chief—Manifesto of the League—Attitude of Henry III. and of Navarre —The League demands a Royal Decree—Designs of France and Spain against England —Secret Interview of Mendoza and Villeroy—Complaints of English Persecution—Edict of Nemours—Excommunication of Navarre and his Reply.

The King, notwithstanding his apparent reluctance, had, in Sir Edward Stafford's language, "nibbled at the bait." He had, however, not been secured at the first attempt, and now a second effort was to be made, under what were supposed to be most

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favourable circumstances. In accordance with his own instructions, his envoy, Des Pruneaux, had been busily employed in the States, arranging the terms of a treaty which should be entirely satisfactory. It had been laid down as an indispensable condition that Holland and Zeeland should unite in the offer of sovereignty, and, after the expenditure of much eloquence, diplomacy, and money, Holland and Zeeland had given their consent. The court had been for some time anxious and impatient for the arrival of the deputies. Early in December, Des Pruneaux wrote from Paris to Count Maurice, urging with some asperity, the necessity of immediate action.

"When I left you," he said, "I thought that performance would follow promises. I have been a little ashamed, as the time passed by, to hear nothing of the deputies, nor of any excuse on the subject. It would seem as though God had bandaged the eyes of those who have so much cause to know their own adversity."

To the States his language was still more insolent. "Excuse me, Gentlemen," he said, "if I tell you that I blush at hearing nothing from you. I shall have the shame and you the damage. I regret much the capture of De Teligny, and other losses which are occasioned by your delays and want of resolution."

Thus did the French court, which a few months before had imprisoned, and then almost ignominiously dismissed the envoys who came to offer the sovereignty of the Provinces, now rebuke the governments which had ever since been strenuously engaged in removing all obstacles to the entire fulfillment of the King's demands. The States were just despatching a solemn embassy to renew that offer, with hardly any limitation as to terms.

The envoys arrived on January 3rd, 1585, at Boulogne, after a stormy voyage from Brielle. Yet it seems incredible to relate, that, after all the ignominy heaped upon the last, there was nothing but solemn trifling in reserve for the present legation; although the object of both embassies was to offer a crown. The deputies were, however, not kept in prison, upon this occasion, nor treated like thieves or spies. They were admirably lodged, with plenty of cooks and lacqueys to minister to them; they fared sumptuously every day, at Henry's expense, and, after they had been six weeks in the kingdom, they at last succeeded in obtaining their first audience.

On the 13th February the King sent five "very splendid, richly-gilded, court-coach-waggons" to bring the envoys to the palace. At one o'clock they arrived at the Louvre, and were ushered through four magnificent antechambers into the royal cabinet. The apartments through which they passed swarmed with the foremost nobles, court-functionaries, and ladies of France, in blazing gala costume, who all greeted the envoys with demonstrations of extreme respect: The halls and corridors were lined with archers, halbardiers, Swiss guards, and grooms "besmeared with gold," and it was

thought that all this rustle of fine feathers would be somewhat startling to the barbarous republicans, fresh from the fens of Holland.

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Henry received them in his cabinet, where he was accompanied only by the Duke of Joyeuse—his foremost and bravest “minion”—by the Count of Bouscaige, M. de Valette, and the Count of Chateau Vieux.

The most Christian King was neatly dressed, in white satin doublet and hose, and well-starched ruff, with a short cloak on his shoulders, a little velvet cap on the side of his head, his long locks duly perfumed and curled, his sword at his side, and a little basket, full of puppies, suspended from his neck by a broad ribbon. He held himself stiff and motionless, although his face smiled a good-humoured welcome to the ambassadors; and he moved neither foot, hand, nor head, as they advanced.

Chancellor Leoninus, the most experienced, eloquent, and tedious of men, now made an interminable oration, fertile in rhetoric and barren in facts; and the King made a short and benignant reply, according to the hallowed formula in such cases provided. And then there was a presentation to the Queen, and to the Queen-Mother, when Leoninus was more prolix than before, and Catharine even more affectionate than her son; and there were consultations with Chiverny and Villeroy, and Brulart and Pruneaux, and great banquets at the royal expense, and bales of protocols, and drafts of articles, and conditions and programmes and apostilles by the hundred weight, and at last articles of annexation were presented by the envoys, and Pruneaux looked at and pronounced them “too raw and imperative,” and the envoys took them home again, and dressed them and cooked them till there was no substance left in them; for whereas the envoys originally offered the crown of their country to France, on condition that no religion but the reformed religion should be tolerated there, no appointments made but by the States, and no security offered for advances to be made by the Christian King, save the hearts and oaths of his new subjects—so they now ended by proposing the sovereignty unconditionally, almost abjectly; and, after the expiration of nearly three months, even these terms were absolutely refused, and the deputies were graciously permitted to go home as they came. The annexation and sovereignty were definitely declined. Henry regretted and sighed, Catharine de’ Medici wept—for tears were ever at her command — Chancellor Chiverny and Secretary Brulart wept likewise, and Pruneaux was overcome with emotion at the parting interview of the ambassadors with the court, in which they were allowed a last opportunity for expressing what was called their gratitude.

And then, on the lath March, M. d’Oignon came to them, and presented, on the part of the King, to each of the envoys a gold chain weighing twenty-one ounces and two grains.

Des Pruneaux, too—Des Pruneaux who had spent the previous summer in the Netherlands, who had travelled from province to province, from city to city, at the King’s command, offering boundless assistance, if they would unanimously offer their sovereignty; who had vanquished by his importunity the resistance of the stern Hollanders, the last of all the Netherlanders to yield to the royal blandishments—Des

Pruneaux, who had “blushed”—Des Pruneaux who had wept—now thought proper to assume an airy tone, half encouragement, half condolence.

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“Man proposes, gentlemen,” said he “but God disposes. We are frequently called on to observe that things have a great variety of times and terms. Many a man is refused by a woman twice, who succeeds the third time,” and so on, with which wholesome apothegms Des Pruneaux faded away then and for ever from the page of Netherland history.

In a few days afterwards the envoys took shipping at Dieppe, and arrived early in April at the Hague.

And thus terminated the negotiation of the States with France.

It had been a scene of elaborate trifling on the King’s part from beginning to end. Yet the few grains of wheat which have thus been extracted from the mountains of diplomatic chaff so long mouldering in national storehouses, contain, however dry and tasteless, still something for human nourishment. It is something to comprehend the ineffable meanness of the hands which then could hold the destiny of mighty empires. Here had been offered a magnificent prize to France; a great extent of frontier in the quarter where expansion was most desirable, a protective network of towns and fortresses on the side most vulnerable, flourishing, cities on the sea-coast where the marine traffic was most lucrative, the sovereignty of a large population, the most bustling, enterprising, and hardy in Europe—a nation destined in a few short years to become the first naval and commercial power in the world—all this was laid at the feet of Henry Valois and Catharine de’ Medici, and rejected.

The envoys, with their predecessors, had wasted eight months of most precious time; they had heard and made orations, they had read and written protocols, they had witnessed banquets, masquerades, and revels of stupendous frivolity, in honour of the English Garter, brought solemnly to the Valois by Lord Derby, accompanied by one hundred gentlemen “marvellously, sumptuously, and richly accoutred,” during that dreadful winter when the inhabitants of Brussels, Antwerp, Mechlin—to save which splendid cities and to annex them to France, was a main object of the solemn embassy from the Netherlands—were eating rats, and cats, and dogs, and the weeds from the pavements, and the grass from the churchyards; and were finding themselves more closely pressed than ever by the relentless genius of Farnese; and in exchange for all these losses and all this humiliation, the ambassadors now returned to their constituents, bringing an account of Chiverny’s magnificent banquets and long orations, of the smiles of Henry III., the tears of Catharine de’ Medici, the regrets of M. des Pruneaux, besides sixteen gold chains, each weighing twenty-one ounces and two grains.

It is worth while to go for a moment behind the scene; We have seen the actors, with mask and cothurn and tinsel crown, playing their well-conned parts upon the stage. Let us hear them threaten, and whimper, and chaffer among themselves.

So soon as it was intimated that Henry III. was about to grant the Netherland, envoys an audience, the wrath of ambassador Mendoza was kindled. That magniloquent Spaniard instantly claimed an interview with the King, before whom, according to the statement of his colleagues, doing their best to pry into these secrets, he blustered and bounced, and was more fantastical in his insolence than even Spanish envoy had ever been before.

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“He went presently to court,” so Walsingham was informed by Stafford, “and dealt very passionately with the King and Queen-Mother to deny them audience, who being greatly offended with his presumptuous and malapert manner of proceeding, the King did in choler and with some sharp speeches, let him plainly understand that he was an absolute king, bound to yield account of his doings to no man, and that it was lawful for him to give access to any man within his own realm. The Queen-Mother answered him likewise very roundly, whereupon he departed for the time, very much discontented.”

Brave words, on both sides, if they had ever been spoken, or if there had been any action corresponding to their spirit.

But, in truth, from the beginning, Henry and his mother saw in the Netherland embassy only the means of turning a dishonest penny. Since the disastrous retreat of Anjou from the Provinces, the city of Cambray had remained in the hands of the Seigneur de Balagny, placed there by the duke. The citadel, garrisoned by French troops, it was not the intention of Catharine de’ Medici to restore to Philip, and a truce on the subject had been arranged provisionally for a year. Philip, taking Parma’s advice to prevent the French court, if possible, from “fomenting the Netherland rebellion,” had authorized the Prince to conclude that truce, as if done on his own responsibility, and not by royal order. Meantime, Balagny was gradually swelling into a petty potentate, on his own account, making himself very troublesome to the Prince of Parma, and requiring a great deal of watching. Cambray was however apparently acquired for France.

But, besides this acquisition, there was another way of earning something solid, by turning this Netherland matter handsomely to account. Philip II. had recently conquered Portugal. Among the many pretensions to that crown, those of Catherine de’ Medici had been put forward, but had been little heeded. The claim went back more than three hundred years, and to establish its validity would have been to convert the peaceable possession of a long line of sovereigns into usurpation. To ascend to Alphonso III. was like fetching, as it was said, a claim from Evander’s grandmother. Nevertheless, ever since Philip had been upon the Portuguese throne, Catherine had been watching the opportunity, not of unseating that sovereign, but of converting her claim into money.

The Netherland embassy seemed to offer the coveted opportunity. There was, therefore, quite as much warmth at the outset, on the part of Mendoza, in that first interview after the arrival of the deputies, as had been represented. There was however less dignity and more cunning on the part of Henry and Catherine than was at all suspected. Even before that conference the King had been impatiently expecting overtures from the Spanish envoy, and had been disappointed. “He told me,” said Henry, “that he would make proposals so soon as Tassis should be

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gone, but he has done nothing yet. He said to Gondi that all he meant was to get the truce of Cambray accomplished. I hope, however, that my brother, the King of Spain, will do what is right in regard to madam my mother's pretensions. 'Tis likely that he will be now incited thereto, seeing that the deputies of all the Netherland provinces are at present in my kingdom, to offer me carte blanche. I shall hear what they have to say, and do exactly what the good of my own affairs shall seem to require. The Queen of England, too, has been very pressing and urgent with me for several months on this subject. I shall hear, too, what she has to say, and I presume, if the King of Spain will now disclose himself, and do promptly what he ought, that we may set Christendom at rest."

Henry then instructed his ambassador in Spain to keep his eyes wide open, in order to penetrate the schemes of Philip, and to this end ordered him an increase of salary by a third, that he might follow that monarch on his journey to Arragon.

Meanwhile Mendoza had audience of his Majesty. "He made a very pressing remonstrance," said the King, "concerning the arrival of these deputies, urging me to send them back at once; denouncing them as disobedient rebels and heretics. I replied that my kingdom was free, and that I should hear from them all that they had to say, because I could not abandon madam my mother in her pretensions, not only for the filial obedience which I owe her, but because I am her only heir. Mendoza replied that he should go and make the same remonstrance to the Queen-Mother, which he accordingly did, and she will herself write you what passed between them. If they do not act up to their duty down there I know how to take my revenge upon them."

This is the King's own statement—his veriest words—and he was surely best aware of what occurred between himself and Mendoza, under their four eyes only. The ambassador is not represented as extremely insolent, but only pressing; and certainly there is little left of the fine periods on Henry's part about listening to the cry of the oppressed, or preventing the rays of his ancestors' diadem from growing pale, with which contemporary chronicles are filled.

There was not one word of the advancement and glory of the French nation; not a hint of the fame to be acquired by a magnificent expansion of territory, still less of the duty to deal generously or even honestly with an oppressed people, who in good faith were seeking an asylum in exchange for offered sovereignty, not a syllable upon liberty of conscience, of religious or civil rights; nothing but a petty and exclusive care for the interests of his mother's pocket, and of his own as his mother's heir. This farthing-candle was alone to guide the steps of "the high and mighty King," whose reputation was perpetually represented as so precious to him in all the conferences between his ministers and the Netherland deputies. Was it possible for those envoys to imagine the almost invisible meanness of such childish tricks?

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The Queen-Mother was still more explicit and unblushing throughout the whole affair.

“The ambassador of Spain,” she said, “has made the most beautiful remonstrances he could think of about these deputies from the Netherlands. All his talk, however, cannot persuade me to anything else save to increase my desire to have reparation for the wrong that has been done me in regard to my claims upon Portugal, which I am determined to pursue by every means within my power. Nevertheless I have told Don Bernardino that I should always be ready to embrace any course likely to bring about a peaceful conclusion. He then entered into a discussion of my rights, which, he said, were not thought in Spain to be founded in justice. But when I explained to him the principal points (of which I possess all the pieces of evidence and justification), he hardly knew what to say, save that he was astounded that I had remained so long without speaking of my claims. In reply, I told him ingenuously the truth.”

The truth which the ingenuous Catharine thus revealed was, in brief, that all her predecessors had been minors, women, and persons in situations not to make their rights valid. Finding herself more highly placed, she had advanced her claims, which had been so fully recognized in Portugal, that she had been received as Infanta of the kingdom. All pretensions to the throne being now through women only, hers were the best of any. At all this Don Bernardino expressed profound astonishment, and promised to send a full account to his master of “the infinite words” which had passed between them at this interview!

“I desire,” said Catharine, “that the Lord King of Spain should open his mind frankly and promptly upon the recompense which he is willing to make me for Portugal, in order that things may pass rather with gentleness than otherwise.”

It was expecting a great deal to look for frankness and promptness from the Lord King of Spain, but the Queen-Mother considered that the Netherland envoys had put a whip into her hand. She was also determined to bring Philip up to the point, without showing her own game. “I will never say,” said Catharine—ingenuous no longer—“I will never say how much I ask, but, on the contrary, I shall wait for him to make the offer. I expect it to be reasonable, because he has seen fit to seize and occupy that which I declare to be my property.”

This is the explanation of all the languor and trifling of the French court in the Netherland negotiation. A deep, constant, unseen current was running counter to all the movement which appeared upon the surface. The tergiversations of the Spanish cabinet in the Portugal matter were the cause of the shufflings of the French ministers on the subject of the Provinces.

“I know well,” said Henry a few days later, “that the people down there, and their ambassador here, are leading us on with words, as far as they can, with regard to the recompense of madam my mother for her claims upon Portugal. But they had better

remember (and I think they will), that out of the offers which these sixteen deputies of the Netherlands are bringing me—and I believe it to be carte blanche—I shall be able to pay myself. 'Twill be better to come promptly to a good bargain and a brief conclusion, than to spin the matter out longer."

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“Don Bernardino,” said the Queen-Mother on the same day, “has been keeping us up to this hour in hopes of a good offer, but ’tis to be feared, for the good of Christendom, that ’twill be too late. The deputies are come, bringing carte blanche. Nevertheless, if the King of Spain is willing to be reasonable, and that instantly, it will be well, and it would seem as if God had been pleased to place this means in our hands.”

After the conferences had been fairly got under way between the French government and the envoys, the demands upon Philip for a good bargain and a handsome offer became still more pressing.

“I have given audience to the deputies from the Provinces,” wrote Henry, “and the Queen-Mother has done the same. Chancellor Chiverny, Villequier, Bellievre, and Brulart, will now confer with them from day today. I now tell you that it will be well, before things go any farther, for the King of Spain to come to reason about the pretensions of madam mother. This will be a means of establishing the repose of Christendom. I shall be very willing to concur in such an arrangement, if I saw any approximation to it on the part of the King or his ministers. But I fear they will delay too long, and so you had better tell them. Push them to the point as much as possible, without letting them suspect that I have been writing about it, for that would make them rather draw back than come forward.”

At the same time, during this alternate threatening and coaxing between the French and the Spanish court, and in the midst of all the solemn and tedious protocolling of the ministry and the Dutch envoys, there was a most sincere and affectionate intercourse maintained between Henry III. and the Prince of Parma. The Spanish Governor-General was assured that nothing but the warmest regard was entertained for him and his master on the part of the French court. Parma had replied, however, that so many French troops had in times past crossed the frontier to assist the rebels, that he hardly knew what to think. He expressed the hope, now that the Duke of Anjou was dead, that his Christian Majesty would not countenance the rebellion, but manifest his good-will.

“How can your Highness doubt it,” said Malpierre, Henry’s envoy, “for his Majesty has given proof enough of his good will, having prevented all enterprises in this regard, and preferred to have his own subjects cut into pieces rather than that they should carry out their designs. Had his Majesty been willing merely to connive at these undertakings, ’tis probable that the affairs of your highness would not have succeeded so well as they have done.”

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With regard to England, also, the conduct of Henry and his mother in these negotiations was marked by the same unfathomable duplicity. There was an appearance of cordiality on the surface; but there was deep plotting, and bargaining, and even deadly hostility lurking below. We have seen the efforts which Elizabeth's government had been making to counteract the policy which offered the sovereignty of the provinces to the French monarch. At the same time there was at least a loyal disposition upon the Queen's part to assist the Netherlands, in concurrence with Henry. The demeanour of Burghley and his colleagues was frankness itself, compared with the secret schemings of the Valois; for at least peace and good-will between the "triumvirate" of France, England and the Netherlands, was intended, as the true means of resisting the predominant influence of Spain.

Yet very soon after the solemn reception by Henry of the garter brought by Lord Derby, and in the midst of the negotiations between the French court and the United Provinces, the French king was not only attempting to barter the sovereignty offered him by the Netherlanders against a handsome recompense for the Portugal claim, but he was actually proposing to the King of Spain to join with him in an invasion of England! Even Philip himself must have admired and respected such a complication of villany on the part of his most Christian brother. He was, however, not disposed to put any confidence in his schemes.

"With regard to the attempt against England," wrote Philip to Mendoza, "you must keep your eyes open—you must look at the danger of letting them, before they have got rid of their rivals and reduced their heretics, go out of their own house and kingdom, and thus of being made fools of when they think of coming back again. Let them first exterminate the heretics of France, and then we will look after those of England; because 'tis more important to finish those who are near than those afar off. Perhaps the Queen-Mother proposes this invasion in order to proceed more feebly with matters in her own kingdom; and thus Mucio (Duke of Guise) and his friends will not have so safe a game, and must take heed lest they be deceived."

Thus it is obvious that Henry and Catharine intended, on the whole, to deceive the English and the Netherlanders, and to get as good a bargain and as safe a friendship from Philip as could be manufactured out of the materials placed in the French King's hands by the United Provinces. Elizabeth honestly wished well to the States, but allowed Burghley and those who acted with him to flatter themselves with the chimera that Henry could be induced to protect the Netherlands without assuming the sovereignty of that commonwealth. The Provinces were fighting for their existence, unconscious of their latent strength, and willing to trust to France or to England, if they could only save themselves from being swallowed by Spain. As for Spain itself, that country was more practised in duplicity even than the government of the Medici-Valois, and was of course more than a match at the game of deception for the franker politicians of England and Holland.

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The King of Navarre had meanwhile been looking on at a distance. Too keen an observer, too subtle a reasoner to doubt the secret source of the movements then agitating France to its centre, he was yet unable to foresee the turn that all these intrigues were about to take. He could hardly doubt that Spain was playing a dark and desperate game with the unfortunate Henry III.; for, as we have seen, he had himself not long before received a secret and liberal offer from Philip II., if he would agree to make war upon the King. But the Bearnese was not the man to play into the hands of Spain, nor could he imagine the possibility of the Valois or even of his mother taking so suicidal a course.

After the Netherland deputies had received their final dismissal from the King, they sent Calvart, who had been secretary to their embassy, on a secret mission to Henry of Navarre, then resident at Chartres.

The envoy communicated to the Huguenot chief the meagre result of the long negotiation with the French court. Henry bade him be of good cheer, and assured him of his best wishes for their cause. He expressed the opinion that the King of France would now either attempt to overcome the Guise faction by gentle means, or at once make war upon them. The Bishop of Acqs had strongly recommended the French monarch to send the King of Navarre, with a strong force, to the assistance of the Netherlands, urging the point with much fervid eloquence and solid argument. Henry for a moment had seemed impressed, but such a vigorous proceeding was of course entirely beyond his strength, and he had sunk back into his effeminate languor so soon as the bold bishop's back was turned.

The Bearnese had naturally conceived but little hope that such a scheme would be carried into effect; but he assured Calvart, that nothing could give him greater delight than to mount and ride in such a cause.

"Notwithstanding," said the Bearnese, "that the villanous intentions of the Guises are becoming plainer and plainer, and that they are obviously supplied with Spanish dollars, I shall send a special envoy to the most Christian King, and, although 'tis somewhat late, implore him to throw his weight into the scale, in order to redeem your country from its misery. Meantime be of good heart, and defend as you have done your hearths, your liberty, and the honour of God."

He advised the States unhesitatingly to continue their confidence in the French King, and to keep him informed of their plans and movements; expressing the opinion that these very intrigues of the Guise party would soon justify or even force Henry III. openly to assist the Netherlands.

So far, at that very moment, was so sharp a politician as the Bearnese from suspecting the secret schemes of Henry of Valois. Calvart urged the King of Navarre to assist the States at that moment with some slight subsidy. Antwerp was in such imminent danger

as to fill the hearts of all true patriots with dismay; and a timely succour, even if a slender one, might be of inestimable value.

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Henry expressed profound regret that his own means were so limited, and his own position so dangerous, as to make it difficult for him to manifest in broad daylight the full affection which he bore the Provinces.

“To my sorrow,” said he, “your proposition is made in the midst of such dark and stormy weather, that those who have clearest sight are unable to see to what issue these troubles of France are tending.”

Nevertheless, with much generosity and manliness, he promised Calvart to send two thousand soldiers, at his own charges, to the Provinces without delay; and authorised that envoy to consult with his agent at the court of the French King, in order to obtain the royal permission for the troops to cross the frontier.

The crownless and almost houseless King had thus, at a single interview, and in exchange for nothing but good wishes, granted what the most Christian monarch of France had refused, after months of negotiation, and with sovereignty as the purchase-money. The envoy, well pleased, sped as swiftly as possible to Paris; but, as may easily be imagined, Henry of Valois forbade the movement contemplated by Henry of Navarre.

“His Majesty,” said Villeroy, secretary of state, “sees no occasion, in so weighty a business, thus suddenly to change his mind; the less so, because he hopes to be able ere long to smooth over these troubles which have begun in France. Should the King either openly or secretly assist the Netherlands or allow them to be assisted, ’twould be a reason for all the Catholics now sustaining his Majesty’s party to go over to the Guise faction. The Provinces must remain firm, and make no pacification with the enemy. Meantime the Queen of England is the only one to whom God has given means to afford you succour. One of these days, when the proper time comes, his Majesty will assist her in affording you relief.”

Calvart, after this conference with the King of Navarre, and subsequently with the government, entertained a lingering hope that the French King meant to assist the Provinces. “I know well who is the author of these troubles,” said the unhappy monarch, who never once mentioned the name of Guise in all those conferences, “but, if God grant me life, I will give him as good as he sends, and make him rue his conduct.”

They were not aware after how many strange vacillations Henry was one day to wreak this threatened vengeance. As for Navarre, he remained upon the watch, good humoured as ever, more merry and hopeful as the tempest grew blacker; manifesting the most frank and friendly sentiments towards the Provinces, and writing to Queen Elizabeth in the chivalrous style so dear to the heart of that sovereign, that he desired nothing better than to be her “servant and captain-general against the common enemy.”

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But, indeed, the French King was not so well informed as he imagined himself to be of the authorship of these troubles. Mucio, upon whose head he thus threatened vengeance, was but the instrument. The concealed hand that was directing all these odious intrigues, and lighting these flames of civil war which were so long to make France a scene of desolation, was that of the industrious letter-writer in the Escorial. That which Henry of Navarre shrewdly suspected, when he talked of the Spanish dollars in the Balafre's pocket, that which was dimly visible to the Bishop of Acqs when he told Henry III. that the "Tagus had emptied itself into the Seine and Loire, and that the gold of Mexico was flowing into the royal cabinet," was much more certain than they supposed.

Philip, in truth, was neglecting his own most pressing interests that he might direct all his energies towards entertaining civil war in France. That France should remain internally at peace was contrary to all his plans. He had therefore long kept Guise and his brother, the Cardinal de Lorraine, in his pay, and he had been spending large sums of money to bribe many of the most considerable functionaries in the kingdom.

The most important enterprises in the Netherlands were allowed to languish, that these subterranean operations of the "prudent" monarch of Spain should be pushed forward. The most brilliant and original genius that Philip had the good fortune to have at his disposal, the genius of Alexander Farnese, was cramped and irritated almost to madness, by the fetters imposed upon it, by the sluggish yet obstinate nature of him it was bound to obey. Farnese was at that moment engaged in a most arduous military undertaking, that famous siege of Antwerp, the details of which will be related in future chapters, yet he was never furnished with men or money enough to ensure success to a much more ordinary operation. His complaints, subdued but intense, fell almost unheeded on his master's ear. He had not "ten dollars at his command," his cavalry horses were all dead of hunger or had been eaten by their riders, who were starving to death themselves, his army had dwindled to a "handful," yet he still held on to his purpose, in spite of famine, the desperate efforts of indefatigable enemies, and all the perils and privations of a deadly winter. He, too, was kept for a long time in profound ignorance of Philip's designs.

Meantime, while the Spanish soldiers were starving in Flanders, Philip's dollars were employed by Mucio and his adherents in enlisting troops in Switzerland and Germany, in order to carry on the civil war in France. The French king was held systematically up to ridicule or detestation in every village-pulpit in his own kingdom, while the sister of Mucio, the Duchess of Montpensier, carried the scissors at her girdle, with which she threatened to provide Henry with a third crown, in addition to those of France and Poland, which he had disgraced—the coronal tonsure of a monk. The convent should be, it was intimated, the eventual fate of the modern Childeric, but meantime it was more important than ever to supersede the ultimate pretensions of Henry of Navarre. To prevent that heretic of heretics, who was not to be bought with Spanish gold, from ever reigning, was the first object of Philip and Mucio.

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Accordingly, on the last day of the year 1584, a secret treaty had been signed at Joinville between Henry of Guise and his brother the Duc de Mayenne, holding the proxies of their brother the Cardinal and those of their uncles, Aumale and Elbeuf, on the one part, and John Baptist Tassis and Commander Moreo, on the other, as representatives of Philip. This transaction, sufficiently well known now to the most superficial student of history, was a profound mystery then, so far as regarded the action of the Spanish king. It was not a secret, however, that the papistical party did not intend that the Bearnese prince should ever come to the throne, and the matter of the succession was discussed, precisely as if the throne had been vacant.

It was decided that Charles, paternal uncle to Henry of Navarre, commonly called the Cardinal Bourbon, should be considered successor to the crown, in place of Henry, whose claim was forfeited by heresy. Moreover, a great deal of superfluous money and learning was expended in ordering some elaborate legal arguments to be prepared by venal jurisconsults, proving not only that the uncle ought to succeed before the nephew, but that neither the one nor the other had any claim to succeed at all. The pea having thus been employed to do the work which the sword alone could accomplish, the poor old Cardinal was now formally established by the Guise faction as presumptive heir to the crown.

A man of straw, a superannuated court-dangler, a credulous trifler, but an earnest Papist as his brother Antony had been, sixty-six years old, and feeble beyond his years, who, his life long, had never achieved one manly action, and had now one foot in the grave; this was the puppet placed in the saddle to run a tilt against the Bearnese, the man with foot ever in the stirrup, with sword rarely in its sheath.

The contracting parties at Joinville agreed that the Cardinal should succeed on the death of the reigning king, and that no heretic should ever ascend the throne, or hold the meanest office in the kingdom. They agreed further that all heretics should be “exterminated” without distinction throughout France and the Netherlands. In order to procure the necessary reforms among the clergy, the council of Trent was to be fully carried into effect. Philip pledged himself to furnish at least fifty thousand crowns monthly, for the advancement of this Holy League, as it was denominated, and as much more as should prove necessary. The sums advanced were to be repaid by the Cardinal on his succeeding to the throne. All the great officers of the crown, lords and gentlemen, cities, chapters, and universities, all Catholics, in short, in the kingdom, were deemed to be included in the league. If any foreign Catholic prince desired to enter the union, he should be admitted with the consent of both parties. Neither his Catholic majesty nor the confederated princes should treat with the most Christian King, either directly or indirectly. The compact was to remain strictly secret—one copy of it being sent to Philip, while the other was to be retained by Cardinal Bourbon and his fellow leaguers.

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And now—in accordance with this program—Philip proceeded stealthily and industriously to further the schemes of Mucio, to the exclusion of more urgent business. Noiseless and secret himself, and delighting in clothing so much as to glide, as it were, throughout Europe, wrapped in the mantle of invisibility, he was perpetually provoked by the noise, the bombast, and the bustle, which his less prudent confederates permitted themselves. While Philip for a long time hesitated to confide the secret of the League to Parma, whom it most imported to understand these schemes of his master, the confederates were openly boasting of the assistance which they were to derive from Parma's cooperation. Even when the Prince had at last been informed as to the state of affairs, he stoutly denied the facts of which the leaguers made their vaunt; thus giving to Mucio and his friends a lesson in dissimulation."

"Things have now arrived at a point," wrote Philip to Tassis, 15th March, 1585, "that this matter of the League cannot and ought not to be concealed from those who have a right to know it. Therefore you must speak clearly to the Prince of Parma, informing him of the whole scheme, and enjoining the utmost secrecy. You must concert with him as to the best means of rendering aid to this cause, after having apprised him of the points which regarded him, and also that of the security of Cardinal de Bourbon, in case of necessity."

The Prince was anything but pleased, in the midst of his anxiety and his almost superhuman labour in the Antwerp siege, to be distracted, impoverished, and weakened, in order to carry out these schemes against France; but he kept the secret manfully.

To Malpierre, the French envoy in Brussels—for there was the closest diplomatic communication between Henry III. and Philip, while each was tampering with the rebellious subjects of the other—to Malpierre Parma flatly contradicted all complicity on the part of the Spanish King or himself with the Holy League, of which he knew Philip to be the originator and the chief.

"If I complain to the Prince of Parma," said the envoy, "of the companies going from Flanders to assist the League, he will make me no other reply than that which the President has done—that there is nothing at all in it—until they are fairly arrived in France. The President (Richardot) said that if the Catholic King belonged to the League, as they insinuate, his Majesty would declare the fact openly."

And a few days later, the Prince himself averred, as Malpierre had anticipated, that "as to any intention on the part of himself or his Catholic Majesty, to send succour to the League, according to the boast of these gentlemen, he had never thought of such a thing, nor had received any order on the subject from his master. If the King intended to do anything of the kind, he would do it openly. He protested that he had never seen anything, or known anything of the League."

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Here was a man who knew how to keep a secret, and who had no scruples in the matter of dissimulation, however enraged he might be at seeing men and money diverted from his own masterly combinations in order to carry out these schemes of his master.

Mucio, on the contrary, was imprudent and inclined to boast. His contempt for Henry III, made him blind to the dangers to be apprehended from Henry of Navarre. He did little, but talked a great deal.

Philip was very anxious that the work should be done both secretly and thoroughly. "Let the business be finished before Saint John's day," said he to Tassis, when sending fifty thousand dollars for the use of the brothers Guise. "Tell Iniquez to warn them not to be sluggish. Let them not begin in a lukewarm manner, but promise them plenty of assistance from me, if they conduct themselves properly. Let them beware of wavering, or of falling into plans of conciliation. If they do their duty, I will do mine."

But the Guise faction moved slowly despite of Philip's secret promptings. The truth is, that the means proposed by the Spanish monarch were ludicrously inadequate to his plans, and it was idle to suppose that the world was to be turned upside down for his benefit, at the very low price which he was prepared to pay.

Nothing less than to exterminate all the heretics in Christendom, to place himself on the thrones of France and of England, and to extinguish the last spark of rebellion in the Netherlands, was his secret thought, and yet it was very difficult to get fifty thousand dollars from him from month to month. Procrastinating and indolent himself, he was for ever rebuking the torpid movements of the Guises.

"Let Mucio set his game well at the outset," said he; "let him lay the axe to the root of the tree, for to be wasting time fruitlessly is sharpening the knife for himself."

This was almost prophetic. When after so much talking and tampering, there began to be recrimination among the leaguers, Philip was very angry with his subordinate.

"Here is Mucio," said he, "trying to throw the blame of all the difficulties, which have arisen, upon us. Not hastening, not keeping his secret, letting the execution of the enterprise grow cold, and lending an ear to suggestions about peace, without being sure of its conclusion, he has turned his followers into cowards, discredited his cause, and given the King of France opportunity to strengthen his force and improve his party. These are all very palpable things. I am willing to continue my friendship for them, but not, if, while they accept it, they permit themselves to complain, instead of manifesting gratitude."

On the whole, however, the affairs of the League seemed prosperous. There was doubtless too much display among the confederates, but there was a growing

uneasiness among the royalists. Cardinal Bourbon, discarding his ecclesiastical robes and scarlet stockings, paraded himself daily in public, clothed in military costume, with all the airs of royalty. Many persons thought him mad. On the other hand, Epergnon, the haughty minion-in-chief, who governed Henry III., and insulted all the world, was becoming almost polite.

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“The progress of the League,” said Busbecq, “is teaching the Duc d’ Epergnon manners. ’Tis a youth of such insolence, that without uncovering he would talk with men of royal descent, while they were bareheaded. ’Tis a common jest now that he has found out where his hat is.”

Thus, for a long time, a network of secret political combinations had been stretching itself over Christendom. There were great movements of troops throughout Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, slowly concentrating themselves upon France; yet, on the whole, the great mass of the populations, the men and women who were to pay, to fight, to starve, to be trampled upon, to be outraged, to be plundered, to be burned out of houses and home, to bleed, and to die, were merely ignorant, gaping spectators. That there was something very grave in prospect was obvious, but exactly what was impending they knew no more than the generation yet unborn. Very noiselessly had the patient manager who sat in the Escorial been making preparations for that European tragedy in which most of the actors had such fatal parts assigned them, and of which few of the spectators of its opening scenes were doomed to witness the conclusion. A shifting and glancing of lights, a vision of vanishing feet, a trampling and bustling of unseen crowds, movements of concealed machinery, a few incoherent words, much noise and confusion vague and incomprehensible, till at last the tinkling of a small bell, and a glimpse of the modest manager stealing away as the curtain was rising—such was the spectacle presented at Midsummer 1585,

And in truth the opening picture was effective. Sixteen black-robed, long-bearded Netherland envoys stalking away, discomfited and indignant upon one side; Catharine de’ Medici on the other, regarding them with a sneer, painfully contorted into a pathetic smile; Henry the King, robed in a sack of penitence, trembling and hesitating, leaning on the arm of Epergnon, but quailing even under the protection of that mighty swordsman; Mucio, careering, truncheon in hand, in full panoply, upon his war-horse, waving forward a mingled mass of German lanzknechts, Swiss musketeers, and Lorraine pikemen; the redoubtable Don Bernardino de Mendoza, in front, frowning and ferocious, with his drawn sword in his hand; Elizabeth of England, in the back ground, with the white-bearded Burghley and the monastic Walsingham, all surveying the scene with eyes of deepest meaning; and, somewhat aside, but in full view, silent, calm, and imperturbably good-humoured, the bold Bearnese, standing with a mischievous but prophetic smile glittering through his blue eyes and curly beard—thus grouped were the personages of the drama in the introductory scenes.

The course of public events which succeeded the departure of the Netherland deputies is sufficiently well known. The secret negotiations and intrigues, however, by which those external facts were preceded or accompanied rest mainly in dusty archives, and it was therefore necessary to dwell somewhat at length upon them in the preceding pages.

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The treaty of Joinville was signed on the last day of the year 1584.

We have seen the real nature of the interview of Ambassador Mendoza with Henry III. and his mother, which took place early in January, 1585. Immediately after that conference, Don Bernardino betook himself to the Duke of Guise, and lost no time in stimulating his confederate to prompt but secret action.

The Netherland envoys had their last audience on the 18th March, and their departure and disappointment was the signal for the general exhibition and explosion. The great civil war began, and the man who refused to annex the Netherlands to the French kingdom soon ceased to be regarded as a king.

On the 31st March, the heir presumptive, just manufactured by the Guises, sent forth his manifesto. Cardinal Bourbon, by this document, declared that for twenty-four years past no proper measures had been taken to extirpate the heresy by which France was infested. There was no natural heir to the King. Those who claimed to succeed at his death had deprived themselves, by heresy, of their rights. Should they gain their ends, the ancient religion would be abolished throughout the kingdom, as it had been in England, and Catholics be subjected to the same frightful tortures which they were experiencing there. New men, admitted to the confidence of the crown, clothed with the highest honours, and laden with enormous emoluments, had excluded the ancient and honoured functionaries of the state, who had been obliged to sell out their offices to these upstart successors. These new favourites had seized the finances of the kingdom, all of which were now collected into the private coffers of the King, and shared by him with his courtiers. The people were groaning under new taxes invented every day, yet they knew nothing of the distribution of the public treasure, while the King himself was so impoverished as to be unable to discharge his daily debts. Meantime these new advisers of the crown had renewed to the Protestants of the kingdom the religious privileges of which they had so justly been deprived, yet the religious peace which had followed had not brought with it the promised diminution of the popular burthens. Never had the nation been so heavily taxed or reduced to such profound misery. For these reasons, he, Cardinal Bourbon, with other princes of the blood, peers, gentlemen, cities, and universities, had solemnly bound themselves by oath to extirpate heresy down to the last root, and to save the people from the dreadful load under which they were languishing. It was for this that they had taken up arms, and till that purpose was accomplished they would never lay them down.

The paper concluded with the hope that his Majesty would not take these warlike demonstrations amiss; and a copy of the document was placed in the royal hands.

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It was very obvious to the most superficial observer, that the manifesto was directed almost as much against the reigning sovereign as against Henry of Navarre. The adherents of the Guise faction, and especially certain theologians in their employ, had taken very bold grounds upon the relations between king and subjects, and had made the public very familiar with their doctrines. It was a duty, they said, “to depose a prince who did not discharge his duty. Authority ill regulated was robbery, and it was as absurd to call him a king who knew not how to govern, as it was to take a blind man for a guide, or to believe that a statue could influence the movements of living men.”

Yet to the faction, inspired by such rebellious sentiments, and which was thundering in his face such tremendous denunciations, the unhappy Henry could not find a single royal or manly word of reply. He threw himself on his knees, when, if ever, he should have assumed an attitude of command. He answered the insolence of the men, who were parading their contempt for his authority, by humble excuses, and supplications for pardon. He threw his crown in the dust before their feet, as if such humility would induce them to place it again upon his head. He abandoned the minions who had been his pride, his joy, and his defence, and deprecated, with an abject whimper, all responsibility for the unmeasured ambition and the insatiable rapacity of a few private individuals. He conjured the party-leaders, who had hurled defiance in his face, to lay down their arms, and promised that they should find in his wisdom and bounty more than all the advantages which they were seeking to obtain by war.

Henry of Navarre answered in a different strain. The gauntlet had at last been thrown down to him, and he came forward to take it up; not insolently nor carelessly, but with the cold courtesy of a Christian knight and valiant gentleman. He denied the charge of heresy. He avowed detestation of all doctrines contrary to the Word of God, to the decrees of the Fathers of the Church, or condemned by the Councils.

The errors and abuses which had from time to time crept into the church, had long demanded, in the opinion of all pious persons, some measures of reform. After many bloody wars, no better remedy had been discovered to arrest the cause of these dire religious troubles, whether in France or Germany, than to permit all men to obey the dictates of their own conscience. The Protestants had thus obtained in France many edicts by which the peace of the kingdom had been secured. He could not himself be denounced as a heretic, for he had always held himself ready to receive instruction, and to be set right where he had erred. To call him “relapsed” was an outrage. Were it true, he were indeed unworthy of the crown, but the world knew that his change at the Massacre of St. Bartholomew had been made under duresse, and that he had returned to the reformed faith when he had recovered

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his liberty. Religious toleration had been the object of his life. In what the tyranny of the popes and the violence of the Spaniards had left him of his kingdom of Navarre, Catholics and Protestants enjoyed a perfect religious liberty. No man had the right, therefore, to denounce him as an enemy of the church, or a disturber of the public repose, for he had ever been willing to accept all propositions of peace which left the rights of conscience protected.

He was a Frenchman, a prince of France, a living member of the kingdom; feeling with its pains, and bleeding with its wounds. They who denounced him were alien to France, factitious portions of her body, feeling no suffering, even should she be consuming with living fire. The Leaguers were the friends and the servants of the Spaniards, while he had been born the enemy, and with too good reason, of the whole Spanish race.

“Let the name of Papist and of Huguenot,” he said, “be heard no more among us. Those terms were buried in the edict of peace. Let us speak only of Frenchmen and of Spaniards. It is the counter-league which we must all unite to form, the natural union of the head with all its members.”

Finally, to save the shedding of so much innocent blood, to spare all the countless miseries of civil war, he implored the royal permission to terminate this quarrel in person, by single combat with the Duke of Guise, one to one, two to two, or in as large a number as might be desired, and upon any spot within or without the kingdom that should be assigned. “The Duke of Guise,” said Henry of Navarre, “cannot but accept my challenge as an honour, coming as it does from a prince infinitely his superior in rank; and thus, may God defend the right.”

This paper, drawn up by the illustrious Duplessis-Mornay, who was to have been the second of the King of Navarre in the proposed duel, was signed 10 June 1585.

The unfortunate Henry III., not so dull as to doubt that the true object of the Guise party was to reduce him to insignificance, and to open their own way to the throne, was too impotent of purpose to follow the dictates which his wisest counsellors urged and his own reason approved. His choice had lain between open hostility with his Spanish enemy and a more terrible combat with that implacable foe wearing the mask of friendship. He had refused to annex to his crown the rich and powerful Netherlands, from dread of a foreign war; and he was now about to accept for himself and kingdom all the horrors of a civil contest, in which his avowed antagonist was the first captain of the age, and his nominal allies the stipendiaries of Philip II.

Villeroy, his prime minister, and Catharine de’ Medici, his mother, had both devoted him to disgrace and ruin. The deputies from the Netherlands had been dismissed, and now, notwithstanding the festivities and exuberant demonstrations of friendship with which

the Earl of Derby’s splendid embassy had been greeted, it became necessary to bind Henry hand and foot to the conspirators, who had sworn the destruction of that Queen, as well as his own, and the extirpation of heresy and heretics in every realm of Christendom.

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On the 9th June the league demanded a royal decree, forbidding the practice of all religion but the Roman Catholic, on pain of death. In vain had the clear-sighted Bishop of Acqs uttered his eloquent warnings. Despite such timely counsels, which he was capable at once of appreciating and of neglecting, Henry followed slavishly the advice of those whom he knew in his heart to be his foes, and authorised the great conspiracy against Elizabeth, against Protestantism, and against himself.

On the 5th June Villeroy had expressed a wish for a very secret interview with Mendoza, on the subject of the invasion of England.

“It needed not this overture,” said that magniloquent Spaniard, “to engender in a person of my talents, and with the heart of a Mendoza, venom enough for vengeance. I could not more desire than I did already to assist in so holy a work; nor could I aspire to greater honour than would be gained in uniting those crowns (of France and Spain) in strict friendship, for the purpose of extirpating heresy throughout Europe, and of chastising the Queen of England—whose abominations I am never likely to forget, having had them so long before my eyes—and of satisfying my just resentment for the injuries she has inflicted on myself. It was on this subject,” continued the ambassador, “that Monsieur de Villeroy wished a secret interview with me, pledging himself—if your Majesty would deign to unite yourself with this King, and to aid him with your forces—to a successful result.”

Mendoza accordingly expressed a willingness to meet the ingenuous Secretary of State—who had so recently been assisting at the banquets and rejoicings with Lord Derby and his companions, which had so much enlivened the French capital—and assured him that his most Catholic Majesty would be only too glad to draw closer the bonds of friendship with the most Christian King, for the service of God and the glory of his Church.

The next day the envoy and the Secretary of State met, very secretly, in the house of the Signor Gondi. Villeroy commenced his harangue by an allusion to the current opinion, that Mendoza had arrived in France with a torch in his hand, to light the fires of civil war in that kingdom, as he had recently done in England.

“I do not believe,” replied Mendoza, “that discreet and prudent persons in France attribute my actions to any such motives. As for the ignorant people of the kingdom, they do not appal me, although they evidently imagine that I have imbibed, during my residence in England, something of the spirit of the enchanter Merlin, that, by signs and cabalistic words alone, I am thought capable of producing such commotions.”

After this preliminary flourish the envoy proceeded to complain bitterly of the most Christian King and his mother, who, after the propositions which they had made him, when on his way to Spain, had, since his return, become so very cold and dry towards him. And on this theme he enlarged for some time.

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Villeroy replied, by complaining, in his turn, about the dealings of the most Catholic King, with the leaguers and the rebels of France; and Mendoza rejoined by an intimation that harping upon past grievances and suspicions was hardly the way to bring about harmony in present matters.

Struck with the justice of this remark, the French Secretary of State entered at once upon business. He made a very long speech upon the tyranny which "that Englishwoman" was anew inflicting upon the Catholics in her kingdom, upon the offences which she had committed against the King of Spain, and against the King of France and his brothers, and upon the aliment which she had been yielding to the civil war in the Netherlands and in France for so many years. He then said that if Mendoza would declare with sincerity, and "without any of the duplicity of a minister"—that Philip would league himself with Henry for the purpose of invading England, in order to reduce the three kingdoms to the Catholic faith, and to place their crowns on the head of the Queen of Scotland, to whom they of right belonged; then that the King, his master, was most ready to join in so holy an enterprise. He begged Mendoza to say with what number of troops the invasion could be made; whether Philip could send any from Flanders or from Spain; how many it would be well to send from France, and under what chieftain; in what manner it would be best to communicate with his most Catholic Majesty; whether it were desirable to despatch a secret envoy to him, and of what quality such agent ought to be. He also observed that the most Christian King could not himself speak to Mendoza on the subject before having communicated the matter to the Queen-Mother, but expressed a wish that a special carrier might be forthwith despatched to Spain; for he might be sure that, on an affair of such weight, he would not have permitted himself to reveal the secret wishes of his master, except by his commands.

Mendoza replied, by enlarging with much enthusiasm on the facility with which England could be conquered by the combined power of France and Spain. If it were not a very difficult matter before—even with the jealousy between the two crowns—how much less so, now that they could join their fleets and armies; now that the arming by the one prince would not inspire the other with suspicion; now that they would be certain of finding safe harbour in each other's kingdoms, in case of unfavourable weather and head-winds, and that they could arrange from what ports to sail, in what direction, and under what commanders. He disapproved, however, of sending a special messenger to Spain, on the ground of wishing to keep the matter entirely secret, but in reality—as he informed Philip—because he chose to keep the management in his own hands; because he could always let slip Mucio upon them, in case they should play him false; because he feared that the leaking out of the secret might discourage the Leaguers, and because he felt that the bolder and more lively were the Cardinal of Bourbon and his confederates, the stronger was the party of the King, his master, and the more intimidated and dispirited would be the mind and the forces of the most Christian King. "And this is precisely the point," said the diplomatist, "at which a minister of your Majesty should aim at this season."

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Thus the civil war in France—an indispensable part of Philip's policy— was to be maintained at all hazards; and although the ambassador was of opinion that the most Christian King was sincere in his proposition to invade England, it would never do to allow any interval of tranquillity to the wretched subjects of that Christian King.

"I cannot doubt," said Mendoza, "that the making of this proposal to me with so much warmth was the especial persuasion of God, who, hearing the groans of the Catholics of England, so cruelly afflicted, wished to force the French King and his minister to feel, in the necessity which surrounds them, that the offending Him, by impeding the grandeur of your Majesty, would be their total ruin, and that their only salvation is to unite in sincerity and truth with your Majesty for the destruction of the heretics."

Therefore, although judging from the nature of the French—he might imagine that they were attempting to put him to sleep, Mendoza, on the whole, expressed a conviction that the King was in earnest, having arrived at the conclusion that he could only get rid of the Guise faction by sending them over to England. "Seeing that he cannot possibly eradicate the war from his kingdom," said the envoy, "because of the boldness with which the Leaguers maintain it, with the strong assistance of your Majesty, he has determined to embrace with much fervour, and without any deception at all, the enterprise against England, as the only remedy to quiet his own dominions. The subjugation of those three kingdoms, in order to restore them to their rightful owner, is a purpose so holy, just, and worthy of your Majesty, and one which you have had so constantly in view, that it is superfluous for me to enlarge upon the subject. Your Majesty knows that its effects will be the tranquillity and preservation of all your realms. The reasons for making the attempt, even without the aid of France, become demonstrations now that she is unanimously in favour of the scheme. The most Christian King is resolutely bent—so far as I can comprehend the intrigues of Villeroy—to carry out this project on the foundation of a treaty with the Guise party. It will not take much time, therefore, to put down the heretics here; nor will it consume much more to conquer England with the armies of two such powerful Princes. The power of that island is of little moment, there being no disciplined forces to oppose us, even if they were all unanimous in its defence; how much less then, with so many Catholics to assist the invaders, seeing them so powerful. If your Majesty, on account of your Netherlands, is not afraid of putting arms into the hands of the Guise family in France, there need be less objection to sending one of that house into England, particularly as you will send forces of your own into that kingdom, by the reduction of which the affairs of Flanders will be secured. To effect the pacification of the Netherlands the sooner, it would be desirable to conquer England as early as October."

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Having thus sufficiently enlarged upon the sincerity of the French King and his prime minister, in their dark projects against a friendly power, and upon the ease with which that friendly power could be subjected, the ambassador begged for a reply from his royal master without delay. He would be careful, meantime, to keep the civil war alive in France—thus verifying the poetical portrait of himself, the truth of which he had just been so indignantly and rhetorically denying—but it was desirable that the French should believe that this civil war was not Philip's sole object. He concluded by drawing his master's attention to the sufferings of the English Catholics. "I cannot refrain," he said, "from placing before your eyes the terrible persecutions which the Catholics are suffering in England; the blood of the martyrs flowing in so many kinds of torments; the groans of the prisoners, of the widows and orphans; the general oppression and servitude, which is the greatest ever endured by a people of God, under any tyrant whatever. Your Majesty, into whose hands God is now pleased to place the means, so long desired, of extirpating and totally destroying the heresies of our time, can alone liberate them from their bondage."

The picture of these kings, prime ministers, and ambassadors, thus plotting treason, stratagem, and massacre, is a dark and dreary one. The description of English sufferings for conscience' sake, under the Protestant Elizabeth, is even more painful; for it had unfortunately too much, of truth, although as wilfully darkened and exaggerated as could be done by religious hatred and Spanish bombast. The Queen was surrounded by legions of deadly enemies. Spain, the Pope, the League, were united in one perpetual conspiracy against her; and they relied on the cooperation of those subjects of hers whom her own cruelty was converting into traitors.

We read with a shudder these gloomy secrets of conspiracy and wholesale murder, which make up the diplomatic history of the sixteenth century, and we cease to wonder that a woman, feeling herself so continually the mark at which all the tyrants and assassins of Europe were aiming— although not possessing perhaps the evidences of her peril so completely as they have been revealed to us—should come to consider every English Papist as a traitor and an assassin. It was unfortunate that she was not able to rise beyond the vile instincts of the age, and by a magnanimous and sublime toleration, to convert her secret enemies into loyal subjects.

And now Henry of Valois was to choose between league and counter-league, between Henry of Guise and Henry of Navarre, between France and Spain. The whole chivalry of Gascony and Guienne, the vast swarm of industrious and hardy Huguenot artisans, the Netherland rebels, the great English Queen, stood ready to support the cause of French nationality, and of all nationalities, against a threatening world-empire, of religious liberty against sacerdotal absolutism, and the crown of a King, whose only merit had hitherto been to acquiesce in a religious toleration dictated to him by others, against those who derided his authority and insulted his person. The bold knight-errant of Christendom, the champion to the utterance against Spain, stood there with lance in rest, and the King scarcely hesitated.

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The League, gliding so long unheeded, now reared its crest in the very palace of France, and full in the monarch's face. With a single shudder the victim fell into its coils.

The choice was made. On the 18th of July (1585) the edict of Nemours was published, revoking all previous edicts by which religious peace had been secured. Death and confiscation of property were now proclaimed as the penalty of practising any religious rites save those of the Roman Catholic Church. Six months were allowed to the Nonconformists to put their affairs in order, after which they were to make public profession of the Catholic religion, with regular attendance upon its ceremonies, or else go into perpetual exile. To remain in France without abjuring heresy was thenceforth a mortal crime, to be expiated upon the gallows. As a matter of course, all Huguenots were instantaneously incapacitated from public office, the mixed chambers of justice were abolished, and the cautionary towns were to be restored. On the other hand, the Guise faction were to receive certain cities into their possession, as pledges that this sanguinary edict should be fulfilled.

Thus did Henry III. abjectly kiss the hand which smote him. His mother, having since the death of Anjou no further interest in affecting to favour the Huguenots, had arranged the basis of this treaty with the Spanish party. And now the unfortunate King had gone solemnly down to the Parliament of Paris, to be present at the registration of the edict. The counsellors and presidents were all assembled, and as they sat there in their crimson robes, they seemed, to the excited imagination of those who loved their country, like embodiments of the impending and most sanguinary tragedy. As the monarch left the parliament-house a faint cry of 'God save the King' was heard in the street. Henry hung his head, for it was long since that cry had met his ears, and he knew that it was a false and languid demonstration which had been paid for by the Leaguers.

And thus was the compact signed—an unequal compact. Madam League was on horseback, armed in proof, said a contemporary; the King was on foot, and dressed in a shirt of penitence. The alliance was not an auspicious one. Not peace, but a firebrand —'facem, non pacem'—had the King held forth to his subjects.

When the news came to Henry of Navarre that the King had really promulgated this fatal edict, he remained for a time, with amazement and sorrow, leaning heavily upon a table, with his face in his right hand. When he raised his head again—so he afterwards asserted—one side of his moustachio had turned white.

Meantime Gregory XIII., who had always refused to sanction the League, was dead, and Cardinal Peretti, under the name of Sixtus V., now reigned in his place. Born of an illustrious house, as he said—for it was a house without a roof—this monk of humble origin was of inordinate ambition. Feigning a humility which was but the cloak to his pride, he was in reality as grasping, self-seeking, and revengeful, as he seemed gentle and devout. It was inevitable that a pontiff of this character should seize the opportunity

offered him to mimic Hildebrand, and to brandish on high the thunderbolts of the Church.

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With a flaming prelude concerning the omnipotence delegated by Almighty God to St. Peter and his successors—an authority infinitely superior to all earthly powers—the decrees of which were irresistible alike by the highest and the meanest, and which hurled misguided princes from their thrones into the abyss, like children of Beelzebub, the Pope proceeded to fulminate his sentence of excommunication against those children of wrath, Henry of Navarre and Henry of Conde. They were denounced as heretics, relapsed, and enemies of God (28th Aug.1585). The King was declared dispossessed of his principality of Bearne, and of what remained to him of Navarre. He was stripped of all dignities, privileges, and property, and especially proclaimed incapable of ever ascending the throne of France.

The Bearnese replied by a clever political squib. A terse and spirited paper found its way to Rome, and was soon affixed, to the statutes of Pasquin and Marforio, and in other public places of that city, and even to the gates of the papal palace. Without going beyond his own doors, his Holiness had the opportunity of reading, to his profound amazement, that Mr. Sixtus, calling himself Pope, had foully and maliciously lied in calling the King of Navarre a heretic. This Henry offered to prove before any free council legitimately chosen. If the Pope refused to submit to such decision, he was himself no better than excommunicate and Antichrist, and the King of Navarre thereby declared mortal and perpetual war upon him. The ancient kings of France had known how to chastise the insolence of former popes, and he hoped, when he ascended the throne, to take vengeance on Mr. Sixtus for the insult thus offered to all the kings of Christendom—and so on, in a vein which showed the Bearnese to be a man rather amused than blasted by these papal fireworks.

Sixtus V., though imperious, was far from being dull. He knew how to appreciate a man when he found one, and he rather admired the cheerful attitude maintained by Navarre, as he tossed back the thunderbolts. He often spoke afterwards of Henry with genuine admiration, and declared that in all the world he knew but two persons fit to wear a crown—Henry of Navarre and Elizabeth of England. "'Twas pity," he said, "that both should be heretics."

And thus the fires of civil war had been lighted throughout Christendom, and the monarch of France had thrown himself head foremost into the flames.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Hibernian mode of expressing himself
His inordinate arrogance
His insolence intolerable
Humility which was but the cloak to his pride
Longer they delay it, the less easy will they find it
Oration, fertile in rhetoric and barren in facts

Round game of deception, in which nobody was deceived
’Twas pity, he said, that both should be heretics
Wasting time fruitlessly is sharpening the knife for himself
With something of feline and feminine duplicity

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