

History of the United Netherlands from the Death of William the Silent to the Twelve Year's Truce, 1586c eBook

History of the United Netherlands from the Death of William the Silent to the Twelve Year's Truce, 1586c 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 46

History of the United Netherlands, Volume 46, 1586

CHAPTER VIII.

Forlorn Condition of Flanders—Parma's secret Negotiations with the Queen—Grafigni and Bodman—Their Dealings with English Counsellors —Duplicity of Farnese—Secret Offers of the English Peace-Party— Letters and Intrigues of De Loo—Drake's Victories and their Effect —Parma's Perplexity and Anxiety—He is relieved by the News from England—Queen's secret Letters to Parma—His Letters and Instructions to Bodman—Bodman's secret Transactions at Greenwich— Walsingham detects and exposes the Plot—The Intriguers baffled— Queen's Letter to Parma and his to the King—Unlucky Results of the Peace—Intrigues—Unhandsome Treatment of Leicester—Indignation of the Earl and Walsingham—Secret Letter of Parma to Philip—Invasion of England recommended—Details of the Project.

Alexander Farnese and his heroic little army had been left by their sovereign in as destitute a condition as that in which Lord Leicester and his unfortunate “paddy persons” had found themselves since their arrival in the Netherlands. These mortal men were but the weapons to be used and broken in the hands of the two great sovereigns, already pitted against each other in mortal combat. That the distant invisible potentate, the work of whose life was to do his best to destroy all European nationality, all civil and religious freedom, should be careless of the instruments by which his purpose was to be effected, was but natural. It is painful to reflect that the great champion of liberty and of Protestantism was almost equally indifferent to the welfare of the human creatures enlisted in her cause. Spaniards and Italians, English and Irish, went half naked and half starving through the whole inclement winter, and perished of pestilence in droves, after confronting the less formidable dangers of battlefield and leaguer. Manfully and sympathetically did the Earl of Leicester—while whining in absurd hyperbole over the angry demeanour of his sovereign towards himself—represent the imperative duty of an English government to succour English troops.

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Alexander Farnese was equally plain-spoken to a sovereign with whom plain-speaking was a crime. In bold, almost scornful language, the Prince represented to Philip the sufferings and destitution of the little band of heroes, by whom that magnificent military enterprise, the conquest of Antwerp, had just been effected. "God will be weary of working miracles for us," he cried, "and nothing but miracles can save the troops from starving." There was no question of paying them their wages, there was no pretence at keeping them reasonably provided with lodging and clothing, but he asserted the undeniable proposition that they "could not pass their lives without eating," and he implored his sovereign to send at least money enough to buy the soldiers shoes. To go foodless and barefoot without complaining, on the frozen swamps of Flanders, in January, was more than was to be expected from Spaniards and Italians. The country itself was eaten bare. The obedient Provinces had reaped absolute ruin as the reward of their obedience. Bruges, Ghent, and the other cities of Brabant and Flanders, once so opulent and powerful, had become mere dens of thieves and paupers. Agriculture, commerce, manufactures—all were dead. The condition of Antwerp was most tragical. The city, which had been so recently the commercial centre of the earth, was reduced to absolute beggary. Its world-wide traffic was abruptly terminated, for the mouth of its great river was controlled by Flushing, and Flushing was in the firm grasp of Sir Philip Sidney, as governor for the English Queen. Merchants and bankers, who had lately been possessed of enormous resources, were stripped of all. Such of the industrial classes as could leave the place had wandered away to Holland and England. There was no industry possible, for there was no market for the products of industry. Antwerp was hemmed in by the enemy on every side, surrounded by royal troops in a condition of open mutiny, cut off from the ocean, deprived of daily bread, and yet obliged to contribute out of its poverty to the maintenance of the Spanish soldiers, who were there for its destruction. Its burghers, compelled to furnish four hundred thousand florins, as the price of their capitulation, and at least six hundred thousand more for the repairs of the dykes, the destruction of which, too long deferred, had only spread desolation over the country without saving the city, and over and above all forced to rebuild, at their own expense, that fatal citadel, by which their liberty and lives were to be perpetually endangered, might now regret at leisure that they had not been as steadfast during their siege as had been the heroic inhabitants of Leyden in their time of trial, twelve years before. Obedient Antwerp was, in truth, most forlorn. But there was one consolation for her and for Philip, one bright spot in the else universal gloom. The ecclesiastics assured Parma, that, notwithstanding the frightful diminution in the population of the city, they had confessed and absolved more persons that Easter than they had ever done since the commencement of the revolt. Great was Philip's joy in consequence. "You cannot imagine my satisfaction," he wrote, "at the news you give me concerning last Easter."

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With a ruined country, starving and mutinous troops, a bankrupt exchequer, and a desperate and pauper population, Alexander Farnese was not unwilling to gain time by simulated negotiations for peace. It was strange, however, that so sagacious a monarch as the Queen of England should suppose it for her interest to grant at that moment the very delay which was deemed most desirable by her antagonist.

Yet it was not wounded affection alone, nor insulted pride, nor startled parsimony, that had carried the fury of the Queen to such a height on the occasion of Leicester's elevation to absolute government. It was still more, because the step was thought likely to interfere with the progress of those negotiations into which the Queen had allowed herself to be drawn.

A certain Grafigni—a Genoese merchant residing much in London and in Antwerp, a meddling, intrusive, and irresponsible kind of individual, whose occupation was gone with the cessation of Flemish trade—had recently made his appearance as a volunteer diplomatist. The principal reason for accepting or rather for winking at his services, seemed to be the possibility of disavowing him, on both sides, whenever it should be thought advisable. He had a partner or colleague, too, named Bodman, who seemed a not much more creditable negotiator than himself. The chief director of the intrigue was, however, Champagny, brother of Cardinal Granvelle, restored to the King's favour and disposed to atone by his exuberant loyalty for his heroic patriotism on a former and most memorable occasion. Andrea de Loo, another subordinate politician, was likewise employed at various stages of the negotiation.

It will soon be perceived that the part enacted by Burghley, Hatton, Croft, and other counsellors, and even by the Queen herself, was not a model of ingenuousness towards the absent Leicester and the States-General. The gentlemen sent at various times to and from the Earl and her Majesty's government; Davison, Shirley, Vavasor, Heneage, and the rest—had all expressed themselves in the strongest language concerning the good faith and the friendliness of the Lord-Treasurer and the Vice-Chamberlain, but they were not so well informed as they would have been, had they seen the private letters of Parma to Philip II.

Walsingham, although kept in the dark as much as it was possible, discovered from time to time the mysterious practices of his political antagonists, and warned the Queen of the danger and dishonour she was bringing upon herself. Elizabeth, when thus boldly charged, equivocated and stormed alternately. She authorized Walsingham to communicate the secrets—which he had thus surprised—to the States-General, and then denied having given any such orders.

In truth, Walsingham was only entrusted with such portions of the negotiations as he had been able, by his own astuteness, to divine; and as he was very much a friend to the Provinces and to Leicester, he never failed to keep them instructed, to the best of his ability. It must be confessed, however, that the shuffling and paltering among great

men and little men, at that period, forms a somewhat painful subject of contemplation at the present day.

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Grafigni having some merchandise to convey from Antwerp to London, went early in the year to the Prince of Parma, at Brussels, in order to procure a passport. They entered into some conversation upon the misery of the country, and particularly concerning the troubles to which the unfortunate merchants had been exposed. Alexander expressed much sympathy with the commercial community, and a strong desire that the ancient friendship between his master and the Queen of England might be restored. Grafigni assured the Prince—as the result of his own observation in England—that the Queen participated in those pacific sentiments: “You are going to England,” replied the Prince, “and you may say to the ministers of her Majesty, that, after my allegiance to my King, I am most favourably and affectionately inclined towards her. If it pleases them that I, as Alexander Farnese, should attempt to bring about an accord, and if our commissioners could be assured of a hearing in England, I would take care that everything should be conducted with due regard to the honour and reputation of her Majesty.”

Grafigni then asked for a written letter of credence. “That cannot be,” replied Alexander; “but if you return to me I shall believe your report, and then a proper person can be sent, with authority from the King to treat with her Majesty.”

Grafigni proceeded to England, and had an interview with Lord Cobham. A few days later that nobleman gave the merchant a general assurance that the Queen had always felt a strong inclination to maintain firm friendship with the House of Burgundy. Nevertheless, as he proceeded to state, the bad policy of the King’s ministers, and the enterprises against her Majesty, had compelled her to provide for her own security and that of her realm by remedies differing in spirit from that good inclination. Being however a Christian princess, willing to leave vengeance to the Lord and disposed to avoid bloodshed, she was ready to lend her ear to a negotiation for peace, if it were likely to be a sincere and secure one. Especially she was pleased that his Highness of Parma should act as mediator of such a treaty, as she considered him a most just and honourable prince in all his promises and actions. Her Majesty would accordingly hold herself in readiness to receive the honourable commissioners alluded to, feeling sure that every step taken by his Highness would comport with her honour and safety.

At about the same time the other partner in this diplomatic enterprise, William Bodman, communicated to Alexander, the result of his observations in England. He stated that Lords Burghley, Buckhurst, and Cobham, Sir Christopher Hatton, and Comptroller Croft, were secretly desirous of peace with Spain and that they had seized the recent opportunity of her pique against the Earl of Leicester to urge forward these underhand negotiations. Some progress had been made; but as no accredited commissioner arrived from the Prince

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of Parma, and as Leicester was continually writing earnest letters against peace, the efforts of these counsellors had slackened. Bodman found them all, on his arrival, anxious as he said, "to get their necks out of the matter;" declaring everything which had been done to be pure matter of accident, entirely without the concurrence of the Queen, and each seeking to outrival the other in the good graces of her Majesty. Grafigni informed Bodman, however, that Lord Cobham was quite to be depended upon in the affair, and would deal with him privately, while Lord Burghley would correspond with Andrea de Loo at Antwerp. Moreover, the servant of Comptroller Croft would direct Bodman as to his course, and would give him daily instructions.

Now it so happened that this servant of Croft, Norris by name, was a Papist, a man of bad character, and formerly a spy of the Duke of Anjou. "If your Lordship or myself should use such instruments as this," wrote Walsingham to Leicester, "I know we should bear no small reproach; but it is the good hap of hollow and doubtful men to be best thought of." Bodman thought the lords of the peace-faction and their adherents not sufficiently strong to oppose the other party with success. He assured Farnese that almost all the gentlemen and the common people of England stood ready to risk their fortunes and to go in person to the field to maintain the cause of the Queen and religious liberty; and that the chance of peace was desperate unless something should turn the tide, such as, for example, the defeat of Drake, or an invasion by Philip of Ireland or Scotland.

As it so happened that Drake was just then engaged in a magnificent career of victory, sweeping the Spanish Main and startling the nearest and the most remote possessions of the King with English prowess, his defeat was not one of the cards to be relied on by the peace-party in the somewhat deceptive game which they had commenced. Yet, strange to say, they used, or attempted to use, those splendid triumphs as if they had been disasters.

Meantime there was an active but very secret correspondence between Lord Cobham, Lord Burghley, Sir James Croft, and various subordinate personages in England, on the one side, and Champagny, President Richardot, La Motte, governor of Gravelines, Andrea de Loo, Grafigni, and other men in the obedient Provinces, more or less in Alexander's confidence, on the other side. Each party was desirous of forcing or wheedling the antagonist to show his hand. "You were employed to take soundings off the English coast in the Duke of Norfolk's time," said Cobham to La Motte: "you remember the Duke's fate. Nevertheless, her Majesty hates war, and it only depends on the King to have a firm and lasting peace."

"You must tell Lord Cobham," said Richardot to La Motte, "that you are not at liberty to go into a correspondence, until assured of the intentions of Queen Elizabeth. Her Majesty ought to speak first, in order to make her good-will manifest," and so on.

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"The 'friend' can confer with you," said Richardot to Champagny; "but his Highness is not to appear to know anything at all about it. The Queen must signify her intentions."

"You answered Champagny correctly," said Burghley to De Loo, "as to what I said last winter concerning her Majesty's wishes in regard to a pacification. The Netherlands must be compelled to return to obedience to the King; but their ancient privileges are to be maintained. You omitted, however, to say a word about toleration, in the Provinces, of the reformed religion. But I said then, as I say now, that this is a condition indispensable to peace."

This was a somewhat important omission on the part of De Loo, and gives the measure of his conscientiousness or his capacity as a negotiator. Certainly for the Lord-Treasurer of England to offer, on the part of her Majesty, to bring about the reduction of her allies under the yoke which they had thrown off without her assistance, and this without leave asked of them, and with no provision for the great principle of religious liberty, which was the cause of the revolt, was a most flagitious trifling with the honour of Elizabeth and of England. Certainly the more this mysterious correspondence is examined, the more conclusive is the justification of the vague and instinctive jealousy felt by Leicester and the States-General as to English diplomacy during the winter and spring of 1586.

Burghley summoned De Loo, accordingly, to recall to his memory all that had been privately said to him on the necessity of protecting the reformed religion in the Provinces. If a peace were to be perpetual, toleration was indispensable, he observed, and her Majesty was said to desire this condition most earnestly.

The Lord-Treasurer also made the not unreasonable suggestion, that, in case of a pacification, it would be necessary to provide that English subjects—peaceful traders, mariners, and the like—should no longer be shut up in the Inquisition prisons of Spain and Portugal, and there starved to death, as, with great multitudes, had already been the case.

Meantime Alexander, while encouraging and directing all these underhand measures, was carefully impressing upon his master that he was not, in the least degree; bound by any such negotiations. "Queen Elizabeth," he correctly observed to Philip, "is a woman: she is also by no means fond of expense. The kingdom, accustomed to repose, is already weary of war therefore, they are all pacifically inclined." "It has been intimated to me," he said, "that if I would send a properly qualified person, who should declare that your Majesty had not absolutely forbidden the coming of Lord Leicester, such an agent would be well received, and perhaps the Earl would be recalled." Alexander then proceeded, with the coolness befitting a trusted governor of Philip II., to comment upon the course which he was pursuing. He could at any time denounce the negotiations which he was secretly prompting. Meantime immense advantages could

be obtained by the deception practised upon an enemy whose own object was to deceive.

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The deliberate treachery of the scheme was cynically enlarged upon, and its possible results mathematically calculated:

Philip was to proceed with the invasion while Alexander was going on with the negotiation. If, meanwhile, they could receive back Holland and Zeeland from the hands of England, that would be an immense success. The Prince intimated a doubt, however, as to so fortunate a result, because, in dealing with heretics and persons of similar quality, nothing but trickery was to be expected. The chief good to be hoped for was to “chill the Queen in her plots, leagues, and alliances,” and during the chill, to carry forward their own great design. To slacken not a whit in their preparations, to “put the Queen to sleep,” and, above all, not to leave the French for a moment unoccupied with internal dissensions and civil war; such was the game of the King and the governor, as expounded between themselves.

President Richardot, at the same time, stated to Cardinal Granvelle that the English desire for peace was considered certain at Brussels. Grafigni had informed the Prince of Parma and his counsellors that the Queen was most amicably disposed, and that there would be no trouble on the point of religion, her Majesty not wishing to obtain more than she would herself be willing to grant. “In this,” said Richardot, “there is both hard and soft;” for knowing that the Spanish game was deception, pure and simple, the excellent President could not bring himself to suspect a possible grain of good faith in the English intentions. Much anxiety was perpetually felt in the French quarter, her Majesty’s government being supposed to be secretly preparing an invasion of the obedient Netherlands across the French frontier, in combination, not with the Bearnese, but with Henry III. So much in the dark were even the most astute politicians. “I can’t feel satisfied in this French matter,” said the President: “we mustn’t tickle ourselves to make ourselves laugh.” Moreover, there was no self-deception nor self-tickling possible as to the unmitigated misery of the obedient Netherlands. Famine was a more formidable foe than Frenchmen, Hollanders, and Englishmen combined; so that Richardot avowed that the “negotiation would be indeed holy,” if it would restore Holland and Zeeland to the King without fighting. The prospect seemed on the whole rather dismal to loyal Netherlands like the old leaguings, intriguing, Hispamolized president of the privy council. “I confess,” said he plaintively, “that England needs chastisement; but I don’t see how we are to give it to her. Only let us secure Holland and Zeeland, and then we shall always find a stick whenever we like to beat the dog.”

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Meantime Andrea de Loo had been bustling and buzzing about the ears of the chief counsellors at the English court during all the early spring. Most busily he had been endeavouring to efface the prevalent suspicion that Philip and Alexander were only trifling by these informal negotiations. We have just seen whether or not there was ground for that suspicion. De Loo, being importunate, however—"as he usually was," according to his own statement—obtained in Burghley's hand a confirmation, by order of the Queen, of De Loo's—letter of the 26th December. The matter of religion gave the worthy merchant much difficulty, and he begged Lord Buckhurst, the Lord Treasurer, and many other counsellors, not to allow this point of toleration to ruin the whole affair; "for," said he, "his Majesty will never permit any exercise of the reformed religion."

At last Buckhurst sent for him, and in presence of Comptroller Croft, gave him information that he had brought the Queen to this conclusion: firstly, that she would be satisfied with as great a proportion of religious toleration for Holland, Zeeland, and the other United Provinces, as his Majesty could concede with safety to his conscience and his honour; secondly, that she required an act of amnesty; thirdly, that she claimed reimbursement by Philip for the money advanced by her to the States.

Certainly a more wonderful claim was never made than this—a demand upon an absolute monarch for indemnity for expenses incurred in fomenting a rebellion of his own subjects. The measure of toleration proposed for the Provinces—the conscience, namely, of the greatest bigot ever born into the world—was likely to prove as satisfactory as the claim for damages propounded by the most parsimonious sovereign in Christendom. It was, however, stipulated that the nonconformists of Holland and Zeeland, who should be forced into exile, were to have their property administered by papist trustees; and further, that the Spanish inquisition was not to be established in the Netherlands. Philip could hardly demand better terms than these last, after a career of victory. That they should be offered now by Elizabeth was hardly compatible with good faith to the States.

On account of Lord Burghley's gout, it was suggested that the negotiators had better meet in England, as it would be necessary for him to take the lead in the matters and as he was but an indifferent traveller. Thus, according to De Loo, the Queen was willing to hand over the United Provinces to Philip, and to toss religious toleration to the winds, if she could only get back the seventy thousand pounds—more or less—which she had invested in an unpromising speculation. A few weeks later, and at almost the very moment when Elizabeth had so suddenly overturned her last vial of wrath upon the discomfited Heneage for having communicated—according to her express command—the fact of the pending negotiations to the Netherland States; at that very instant Parma was writing secretly, and in cipher, to Philip. His communication—could Sir Thomas have read it—might have partly explained her Majesty's rage.

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Parma had heard, he said, through Bodman, from Comptroller Croft, that the Queen would willingly receive a proper envoy. It was very easy to see, he observed, that the English counsellors were seeking every means of entering into communication with Spain, and that they were doing so with the participation of the Queen! Lord-Treasurer Burghley and Comptroller Croft had expressed surprise that the Prince had not yet sent a secret agent to her Majesty, under pretext of demanding explanations concerning Lord Leicester's presence in the Provinces, but in reality to treat for peace. Such an agent, it had been intimated, would be well received. The Lord-Treasurer and the Comptroller would do all in their power to advance the negotiation, so that, with their aid and with the pacific inclination of the Queen, the measures proposed in favour of Leicester would be suspended, and perhaps the Earl himself and all the English would be recalled.

The Queen was further represented as taking great pains to excuse both the expedition of Sir Francis Drake to the Indies, and the mission of Leicester to the Provinces. She was said to throw the whole blame of these enterprises upon Walsingham and other ill-intentioned personages, and to avow that she now understood matters better; so that, if Parma would at once send an envoy, peace would, without question, soon be made.

Parma had expressed his gratification at these hopeful dispositions on the part of Burghley and Croft, and held out hopes of sending an agent to treat with them, if not directly with her Majesty. For some time past—according to the Prince—the English government had not seemed to be honestly seconding the Earl of Leicester, nor to correspond with his desires. “This makes me think,” he said, “that the counsellors before-mentioned, being his rivals, are trying to trip him up.”

In such a caballing, prevaricating age, it is difficult to know which of all the plotters and counterplotters engaged in these intrigues could accomplish the greatest amount of what—for the sake of diluting in nine syllables that which could be more forcibly expressed in one—was then called diplomatic dissimulation. It is to be feared, notwithstanding her frequent and vociferous denials, that the robes of the “imperial votaress” were not so unsullied as could be wished. We know how loudly Leicester had complained—we have seen how clearly Walsingham could convict; but Elizabeth, though convicted, could always confute: for an absolute sovereign, even without resorting to Philip's syllogisms of axe and faggot, was apt in the sixteenth century to have the best of an argument with private individuals.

The secret statements of Parma-made, not for public effect, but for the purpose of furnishing his master with the most accurate information he could gather as to English policy—are certainly entitled to consideration. They were doubtless founded upon the statements of individuals rejoicing in no very elevated character; but those individuals had no motive to deceive their patron. If they clashed with the vehement declarations of very eminent personages, it must be admitted, on the other hand, that they were singularly in accordance with the silent eloquence of important and mysterious events.

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As to Alexander Farnese—without deciding the question whether Elizabeth and Burghley were deceiving Walsingham and Leicester, or only trying to delude Philip and himself—he had no hesitation, of course, on his part, in recommending to Philip the employment of unlimited dissimulation. Nothing could be more ingenuous than the intercourse between the King and his confidential advisers. It was perfectly understood among them that they were always to deceive every one, upon every occasion. Only let them be false, and it was impossible to be wholly wrong; but grave mistakes might occur from occasional deviations into sincerity. It was no question at all, therefore, that it was Parma's duty to delude Elizabeth and Burghley. Alexander's course was plain. He informed his master that he would keep these difficulties alive as much as it was possible. In order to "put them all to sleep with regard to the great enterprise of the invasion," he would send back Bodman to Burghley and Croft, and thus keep this unofficial negotiation upon its legs. The King was quite uncommitted, and could always disavow what had been done. Meanwhile he was gaining, and his adversaries losing, much precious time. "If by this course," said Parma, "we can induce the English to hand over to us the places which they hold in Holland and Zeeland, that will be a great triumph." Accordingly he urged the King not to slacken, in the least, his preparations for invasion, and, above all, to have a care that the French were kept entangled and embarrassed among themselves, which was a most substantial point.

Meantime Europe was ringing with the American successes of the bold corsair Drake. San Domingo, Porto Rico, Santiago, Cartliagena, Florida, were sacked and destroyed, and the supplies drawn so steadily from the oppression of the Western World to maintain Spanish tyranny in Europe, were for a time extinguished. Parma was appalled at these triumphs of the Sea-King—"a fearful man to the King of Spain"—as Lord Burghley well observed. The Spanish troops were starving in Flanders, all Flanders itself was starving, and Philip, as usual, had sent but insignificant remittances to save his perishing soldiers. Parma had already exhausted his credit. Money was most difficult to obtain in such a forlorn country; and now the few rich merchants and bankers of Antwerp that were left looked very black at these crushing news from America. "They are drawing their purse-strings very tight," said Alexander, "and will make no accommodation. The most contemplative of them ponder much over this success of Drake, and think that your Majesty will forget our matters here altogether." For this reason he informed the King that it would be advisable to drop all further negotiation with England for the time, as it was hardly probable that, with such advantages gained by the Queen, she would be inclined to proceed in the path which had been just secretly opened. Moreover, the

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Prince was in a state of alarm as to the intentions of France. Mendoza and Tassis had given him to understand that a very good feeling prevailed between the court of Henry and of Elizabeth, and that the French were likely to come to a pacification among themselves. In this the Spanish envoys were hardly anticipating so great an effect as we have seen that they had the right to do from their own indefatigable exertions; for, thanks to their zeal, backed by the moderate subsidies furnished by their master, the civil war in France already seemed likely to be as enduring as that of the Netherlands. But Parma—still quite in the dark as to French politics—was haunted by the vision of seventy thousand foot and six thousand horses ready to be let slip upon him at any moment, out of a pacified and harmonious France; while he had nothing but a few starving and crippled regiments to withstand such an invasion. When all these events should have taken place, and France, in alliance with England, should have formally declared war against Spain, Alexander protested that he should have learned nothing new.

The Prince was somewhat mistaken as to political affairs; but his doubts concerning his neighbours, blended with the forlorn condition of himself and army, about which there was no doubt at all, showed the exigencies of his situation. In the midst of such embarrassments it is impossible not to admire his heroism as a military chieftain, and his singular adroitness as a diplomatist. He had painted for his sovereign a most faithful and horrible portrait of the obedient Provinces. The soil was untilled; the manufactories had all stopped; trade had ceased to exist. It was a pity only to look upon the raggedness of his soldiers. No language could describe the misery of the reconciled Provinces—Artois, Hainault, Flanders. The condition of Bruges would melt the hardest heart; other cities were no better; Antwerp was utterly ruined; its inhabitants were all starving. The famine throughout the obedient Netherlands was such as had not been known for a century. The whole country had been picked bare by the troops, and the plough was not put into the ground. Deputations were constantly with him from Bruges, Dendermonde, Bois-le-Duc, Brussels, Antwerp, Nymegen, proving to him by the most palpable evidence that the whole population of those cities had almost literally nothing to eat. He had nothing, however, but exhortations to patience to feed them withal. He was left without a groat even to save his soldiers from starving, and he wildly and bitterly, day after day, implored his sovereign for aid. These pictures are not the sketches of a historian striving for effect, but literal transcripts from the most secret revelations of the Prince himself to his sovereign. On the other hand, although Leicester's complaints of the destitution of the English troops in the republic were almost as bitter, yet the condition of the United Provinces was comparatively healthy. Trade, external and internal, was increasing daily. Distant commercial and military expeditions were fitted out, manufactures were prosperous, and the war of independence was gradually becoming—strange to say—a source of prosperity to the new commonwealth.

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Philip—being now less alarmed than his nephew concerning French affairs, and not feeling so keenly the misery of the obedient Provinces, or the wants of the Spanish army—sent to Alexander six hundred thousand ducats, by way of Genoa. In the letter submitted by his secretary recording this remittance, the King made, however, a characteristic marginal note:— “See if it will not be as well to tell him something concerning the two hundred thousand ducats to be deducted for Mucio, for fear of more mischief, if the Prince should expect the whole six hundred thousand.”

Accordingly Mucio got the two hundred thousand. One-third of the meagre supply destined for the relief of the King's starving and valiant little army in the Netherlands was cut off to go into the pockets of the intriguing Duke of Guise. “We must keep the French,” said Philip, “in a state of confusion at home, and feed their civil war. We must not allow them to come to a general peace, which would be destruction for the Catholics. I know you will put a good face on the matter; and, after all, 'tis in the interest of the Netherlands. Moreover, the money shall be immediately refunded.”

Alexander was more likely to make a wry face, notwithstanding his views of the necessity of fomenting the rebellion against the House of Valois. Certainly if a monarch intended to conquer such countries as France, England, and Holland, without stirring from his easy chair in the Escorial, it would have been at least as well—so Alexander thought—to invest a little more capital in the speculation. No monarch ever dreamed of arriving at universal empire with less personal fatigue or exposure, or at a cheaper rate, than did Philip II. His only fatigue was at his writing-table. But even here his merit was of a subordinate description. He sat a great while at a time. He had a genius for sitting; but he now wrote few letters himself. A dozen words or so, scrawled in hieroglyphics at the top, bottom, or along the margin of the interminable despatches of his secretaries, contained the suggestions, more or less luminous, which arose in his mind concerning public affairs. But he held firmly to his purpose: He had devoted his life to the extermination of Protestantism, to the conquest of France and England, to the subjugation of Holland. These were vast schemes. A King who should succeed in such enterprises, by his personal courage and genius, at the head of his armies, or by consummate diplomacy, or by a masterly system of finance-husbanding and concentrating the resources of his almost boundless realms—might be in truth commended for capacity. Hitherto however Philip's triumph had seemed problematical; and perhaps something more would be necessary than letters to Parma, and paltry remittances to Mucio, notwithstanding Alexander's splendid but local victories in Flanders.

Parma, although in reality almost at bay, concealed his despair, and accomplished wonders in the field. The military events during the spring and summer of 1586 will be sketched in a subsequent chapter. For the present it is necessary to combine into a complete whole the subterranean negotiations between Brussels and England.

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Much to his surprise and gratification, Parma found that the peace-party were not inclined to change their views in consequence of the triumphs of Drake. He soon informed the King that—according to Champagny and Bodman—the Lord Treasurer, the Comptroller, Lord Cobham, and Sir Christopher Hatton, were more pacific than they had ever been. These four were represented by Grafigni as secretly in league against Leicester and Walsingham, and very anxious to bring about a reconciliation between the crowns of England and Spain. The merchant-diplomatist, according to his own statement, was expressly sent by Queen Elizabeth to the prince of Parma, although without letter of credence or signed instructions, but with the full knowledge and approbation of the four counsellors just mentioned. He assured Alexander that the Queen and the majority of her council felt a strong desire for peace, and had manifested much repentance for what had been done. They had explained their proceedings by the necessity of self-defence. They had avowed—in case they should be made sure of peace—that they should, not with reluctance and against their will, but, on the contrary, with the utmost alacrity and at once, surrender to the King of Spain the territory which they possessed in the Netherlands, and especially the fortified towns in Holland and Zeeland; for the English object had never been conquest. Parma had also been informed of the Queen's strong desire that he should be employed as negotiator, on account of her great confidence in his sincerity. They had expressed much satisfaction on hearing that he was about to send an agent to England, and had protested themselves rejoiced at Drake's triumphs, only because of their hope that a peace with Spain would thus be rendered the easier of accomplishment. They were much afraid, according to Grafigni, of Philip's power, and dreaded a Spanish invasion of their country, in conjunction with the Pope. They were now extremely anxious that Parma—as he himself informed the King—should send an agent of good capacity, in great secrecy, to England.

The Comptroller had said that he had pledged himself to such a result, and if it failed, that they would probably cut off his head. The four counsellors were excessively solicitous for the negotiation, and each of them was expecting to gain favour by advancing it to the best of his ability.

Parma hinted at the possibility that all these professions were false, and that the English were only intending to keep the King from the contemplated invasion. At the same time he drew Philip's attention to the fact that Burghley and his party had most evidently been doing everything in their power to obstruct Leicester's progress in the Netherlands and to keep back the reinforcements of troops and money which he so much required.

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No doubt these communications of Parma to the King were made upon the faith of an agent not over-scrupulous, and of no elevated or recognised rank in diplomacy. It must be borne in mind, however, that he had been made use of by both parties; perhaps because it would be easy to throw off, and discredit, him whenever such a step should be convenient; and that, on the other hand, coming fresh from Burghley and the rest into the presence of the keen-eyed Farnese, he would hardly invent for his employer a budget of falsehoods. That man must have been a subtle negotiator who could outwit such a statesman as Burghley—and the other counsellors of Elizabeth, and a bold one who could dare to trifle on a momentous occasion with Alexander of Parma.

Leicester thought Burghley very much his friend, and so thought Davison and Heneage; and the Lord-Treasurer had, in truth, stood stoutly by the Earl in the affair of the absolute governorship;—"a matter more severe and cumbersome to him and others," said Burghley, "than any whatsoever since he was a counsellor." But there is no doubt that these negotiations were going forward all the spring and summer, that they were most detrimental to Leicester's success, and that they were kept—so far as it was possible—a profound secret from him, from Walsingham, and from the States-General. Nothing was told them except what their own astuteness had discovered beforehand; and the game of the counsellors—so far as their attitude towards Leicester and Walsingham was concerned— seems both disingenuous and impolitic.

Parma, it was to be feared, was more than a match for the English governor-general in the field; and it was certainly hopeless for poor old Comptroller Croft, even though backed by the sagacious Burghley, to accomplish so great an amount of dissimulation in a year as the Spanish cabinet, without effort, could compass in a week. Nor were they attempting to do so. It is probable that England was acting towards Philip in much better faith than he deserved, or than Parma believed; but it is hardly to be wondered at that Leicester should think himself injured by being kept perpetually in the dark.

Elizabeth was very impatient at not receiving direct letters from Parma, and her anxiety on the subject explains much of her caprice during the quarrel about the governor-generalship. Many persons in the Netherlands thought those violent scenes a farce, and a farce that had been arranged with Leicester beforehand. In this they were mistaken; for an examination of the secret correspondence of the period reveals the motives—which to contemporaries were hidden—of many strange transactions. The Queen was, no doubt, extremely anxious, and with cause, at the tempest slowly gathering over her head; but the more the dangers thickened, the more was her own official language to those in high places befitting the sovereign of England.

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She expressed her surprise to Farnese that he had not written to her on the subject of the Grafigni and Bodman affair. The first, she said, was justified in all which he had narrated, save in his assertion that she had sent him. The other had not obtained audience, because he had not come provided with any credentials, direct or indirect. Having now understood from Andrea de Loo and the Seigneur de Champagny that Parma had the power to conclude a peace, which he seemed very much to desire, she observed that it was not necessary for him to be so chary in explaining the basis of the proposed negotiations. It was better to enter into a straightforward path, than by ambiguous words to spin out to great length matters which princes should at once conclude.

“Do not suppose,” said the Queen, “that I am seeking what belongs to others. God forbid. I seek only that which is mine own. But be sure that I will take good heed of the sword which threatens me with destruction, nor think that I am so craven-spirited as to endure a wrong, or to place myself at the mercy of my enemy. Every week I see advertisements and letters from Spain that this year shall witness the downfall of England; for the Spaniards—like the hunter who divided, with great liberality, among his friends the body and limbs of the wolf, before it had been killed—have partitioned this kingdom and that of Ireland before the conquest has been effected. But my royal heart is no whit appalled by such threats. I trust, with the help of the Divine hand—which has thus far miraculously preserved me—to smite all these braggart powers into the dust, and to preserve my honour, and the kingdoms which He has given me for my heritage.

“Nevertheless, if you have authority to enter upon and to conclude this negotiation, you will find my ears open to hear your propositions; and I tell you further, if a peace is to be made, that I wish you to be the mediator thereof. Such is the affection I bear you, notwithstanding that some letters, written by your own hand, might easily have effaced such sentiments from my mind.”

Soon afterwards, Bodman was again despatched to England, Grafigni being already there. He was provided with unsigned instructions, according to which he was to say that the Prince, having heard of the Queen’s good intentions, had despatched him and Grafigni to her court. They were to listen to any suggestions made by the Queen to her ministers; but they were to do nothing but listen. If the counsellors should enter into their grievances against his Majesty, and ask for explanations, the agents were to say that they had no authority or instructions to speak for so great and Christian a monarch. Thus they were to cut the thread of any such discourse, or any other observations not to the purpose.

Silence, in short, was recommended, first and last, as the one great business of their mission; and it was unlucky that men whose talent for taciturnity was thus signally relied upon should be somewhat remarkable for loquacity. Grafigni was also the bearer of a letter from Alexander to the Queen—of which Bodman received a copy—but it was

strictly enjoined upon them to keep the letter, their instructions, and the objects of their journey, a secret from all the world.

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The letter of the Prince consisted mainly of complimentary flourishes. He had heard, he said, all that Agostino Grafigni had communicated, and he now begged her Majesty to let him understand the course which it was proper to take; assuring her of his gratitude for her good opinion touching his sincerity, and his desire to save the effusion of blood, and so on; concluding of course with expressions of most profound consideration and devotion.

Early in July Bodman arrived in London. He found Grafigni in very low spirits. He had been with Lord Cobham, and was much disappointed with his reception, for Cobham—angry that Grafigni had brought no commission from the King—had refused to receive Parma's letter to the Queen, and had expressed annoyance that Bodman should be employed on this mission, having heard that he was very ill-tempered and passionate. The same evening, he had been sent for by Lord Burghley—who had accepted the letter for her Majesty without saying a word—and on the following morning, he had been taken to task, by several counsellors, on the ground that the Prince, in that communication, had stated that the Queen had expressed a desire for peace.

It has just been shown that there was no such intimation at all in the letter; but as neither Grafigni nor Bodman had read the epistle itself, but only the copy furnished them, they could merely say that such an assertion; if made by the Prince, had been founded on no statement of theirs. Bodman consoled his colleague, as well as he could, by assurances that when the letter was fairly produced, their vindication would be complete, and Grafigni, upon that point, was comforted. He was, however, very doleful in general, and complained bitterly of Burghley and the other English counsellors. He said that they had forced him, against his will, to make this journey to Brussels, that they had offered him presents, that they would leave him no rest in his own house, but had made him neglect all his private business, and caused him a great loss of time and money, in order that he might serve them. They had manifested the strongest desire that Parma should open this communication, and had led him to expect a very large recompense for his share in the transaction. "And now," said Grafigni to his colleague, with great bitterness, "I find no faith nor honour in them at all. They don't keep their word, and every one of them is trying to slide out of the very business, in which each was, but the other day, striving to outrival the other, in order that it might be brought to a satisfactory conclusion."

After exploding in this way to Bodman, he went back to Cobham, and protested, with angry vehemence, that Parma had never written such a word to the Queen, and that so it would prove, if the letter were produced.

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Next day, Bodman was sent for to Greenwich, where her Majesty was, as usual, residing. A secret pavilion was indicated to him, where he was to stay until sunset. When that time arrived, Lord Cobham's secretary came with great mystery, and begged the emissary to follow him, but at a considerable distance, towards the apartments of Lord Burghley in the palace. Arriving there, they found the Lord Treasurer accompanied by Cobham and Croft. Burghley instantly opened the interview by a defence of the Queen's policy in sending troops to the Netherlands, and in espousing their cause, and then the conversation proceeded to the immediate matter in hand.

Bodman (after listening respectfully to the Lord-Treasurer's observations).—"His Highness has, however, been extremely surprised that my Lord Leicester should take an oath, as governor-general of the King's Provinces. He is shocked likewise by the great demonstrations of hostility on the part of her Majesty."

Burghley.—"The oath was indispensable. The Queen was obliged to tolerate the step on account of the great urgency of the States to have a head. But her Majesty has commanded us to meet you on this occasion, in order to hear what you have to communicate on the part of the Prince of Parma."

Bodman (after a profusion of complimentary phrases).—"I have no commission to say anything. I am only instructed to listen to anything that may be said to me, and that her Majesty may be pleased to command."

Burghley.—"'Tis very discreet to begin thus. But time is pressing, and it is necessary to be brief. We beg you therefore to communicate, without further preface, that which you have been charged to say."

Bodman.—"I can only repeat to your Lordship, that I have been charged to say nothing."

After this Barmecide feast of diplomacy, to partake of which it seemed hardly necessary that the guests should have previously attired themselves in such garments of mystery, the parties separated for the night.

In spite of their care, it would seem that the Argus-eyed Walsingham had been able to see after sunset; for, the next evening—after Bodman had been introduced with the same precautions to the same company, in the same place—Burghley, before a word had been spoken, sent for Sir Francis.

Bodman was profoundly astonished, for he had been expressly informed that Walsingham was to know nothing of the transaction. The Secretary of State could not so easily be outwitted, however, and he was soon seated at the table, surveying the scene, with his grave melancholy eyes, which had looked quite through the whole paltry intrigue.

Burghley.—“Her Majesty has commanded us to assemble together, in order that, in my presence, it may be made clear that she did not commence this negotiation. Let Grafigni be summoned.”

Grafigni immediately made his appearance.

Burghley.—“You will please to explain how you came to enter into this business.”

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Grafigni.—“The first time I went to the States, it was on my private affairs; I had no order from any one to treat with the Prince of Parma. His Highness, having accidentally heard, however, that I resided in England, expressed a wish to see me. I had an interview with the Prince. I told him, out of my own head, that the Queen had a strong inclination to hear propositions of peace, and that—as some of her counsellors were of the same opinion—I believed that if his Highness should send a negotiator, some good would be effected. The Prince replied that he felt by no means sure of such a result; but that, if I should come back from England, sent by the Queen or her council, he would then despatch a person with a commission to treat of peace. This statement, together with other matters that had passed between us, was afterwards drawn up in writing by command of his Highness.”

Burghley.—“Who bade you say, after your second return to Brussels, that you came on the part of the Queen? For you well know that her Majesty did not send you.”

Grafigni.—“I never said so. I stated that my Lord Cobham had set down in writing what I was to say to the Prince of Parma. It will never appear that I represented the Queen as desiring peace. I said that her Majesty would lend her ears to peace. Bodman knows this too; and he has a copy of the letter of his Highness.”

Walsingham to Bodman.—“Have you the copy still?”

Bodman.—“Yes, Mr. Secretary.”

Walsingham.—“Please to produce it, in order that this matter may be sifted to the bottom.”

Bodman.—“I supplicate your Lorships to pardon me, but indeed that cannot be. My instructions forbid my showing the letter.”

Walsingham (rising).—“I will forthwith go to her Majesty, and fetch the original.” A pause. Mr. Secretary returns in a few minutes, having obtained the document, which the Queen, up to that time, had kept by her, without showing it to any one.

Walsingham (after reading the letter attentively, and aloud).—“There is not such a word, as that her Majesty is desirous of peace, in the whole paper.”

Burghley (taking the letter, and slowly construing it out of Italian into English).—“It would seem that his Highness hath written this, assuming that the Signor Grafigni came from the Queen, although he had received his instructions from my Lord Cobham. It is plain, however, that the negotiation was commenced accidentally.”

Comptroller Croft (nervously, and with the air of a man fearful of getting into trouble).—“You know very well, Mr. Bodman, that my servant came to Dunkirk only to buy and truck away horses; and that you then, by chance, entered into talk with him, about the

best means of procuring a peace between the two kingdoms. My servant told you of the good feeling that prevailed in England. You promised to write on the subject to the Prince, and I immediately informed the Lord-Treasurer of the whole transaction.”

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Burghley.—“That is quite true.”

Croft.—“My servant subsequently returned to the Provinces in order to learn what the Prince might have said on the subject.”

Bodman (with immense politeness, but very decidedly).—“Pardon me, Mr. Comptroller; but, in this matter, I must speak the truth, even if the honour and life of my father were on the issue. I declare that your servant Norris came to me, directly commissioned for that purpose by yourself, and informed me from you, and upon your authority, that if I would solicit the Prince of Parma to send a secret agent to England, a peace would be at once negotiated. Your servant entreated me to go to his Highness at Brussels. I refused, but agreed to consider the proposition. After the lapse of several days, the servant returned to make further enquiries. I told him that the Prince had come to no decision. Norris continued to press the matter. I excused myself. He then solicited and obtained from me a letter of introduction to De Loo, the secretary of his Highness. Armed with this, he went to Brussels and had an interview—as I found, four days later—with the Prince. In consequence of the representations of Norris, those of Signor Grafigni, and those by way of Antwerp, his Highness determined to send me to England.”

Burghley to Croft.—“Did you order your servant to speak with Andrea de Loo?”

Croft.—“I cannot deny it.”

Burghley.—“The fellow seems to have travelled a good way out of his commission. His master sends him to buy horses, and he commences a peace-negotiation between two kingdoms. It would be well he were chastised. As regards the Antwerp matter, too, we have had many letters, and I have, seen one from the Seigneur de Champagny, the same effect as that of all the rest.”

Walsingham.—“I see not to what end his Highness of Parma has sent Mr. Bodman hither. The Prince avows that he hath no commission from Spain.”

Bodman.—“His Highness was anxious to know what was her Majesty’s pleasure. So soon as that should be known, the Prince could obtain ample authority. He would never have proceeded so far without meaning a good end.”

Walsingham.—“Very like. I dare say that his Highness will obtain the commission. Meantime, as Prince of Parma, he writes these letters, and assists his sovereign perhaps more than he doth ourselves.”

Here the interview terminated. A few days later, Bodman had another conversation with Burghley and Cobham. Reluctantly, at their urgent request, he set down in writing all that he had said concerning his mission.

The Lord Treasurer said that the Queen and her counsellors were “ready to embrace peace when it was treated of sincerely.” Meantime the Queen had learned that the Prince had been sending letters to the cautionary towns in Holland and Zeeland, stating that her Majesty was about to surrender them to the King of Spain. These were tricks to make mischief, and were very detrimental to the Queen.

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Bodman replied that these were merely the idle stories of quidnuncs; and that the Prince and all his counsellors were dealing with the utmost sincerity.

Burghley answered that he had intercepted the very letters, and had them in his possession.

A week afterwards, Bodman saw Walsingham alone, and was informed by him that the Queen had written an answer to Parma's letter, and that negotiations for the future were to be carried on in the usual form, or not at all. Walsingham, having thus got the better of his rivals, and delved below their mines, dismissed the agent with brief courtesy. Afterwards the discomfited Mr. Comptroller wished a private interview with Bodman. Bodman refused to speak with him except in presence of Lord Cobham. This Croft refused. In the same way Bodman contrived to get rid, as he said, of Lord Burghley and Lord Cobham, declining to speak with either of them alone. Soon afterwards he returned to the Provinces!

The Queen's letter to Parma was somewhat caustic. It was obviously composed through the inspiration of Walsingham rather than that of Burghley. The letter, brought by a certain Grafigni and a certain Bodman, she said, was a very strange one, and written under a delusion. It was a very grave error, that, in her name, without her knowledge, contrary to her disposition, and to the prejudice of her honour, such a person as this Grafigni, or any one like him, should have the audacity to commence such a business, as if she had, by messages to the Prince, sought a treaty with his King, who had so often returned evil for her good. Grafigni, after representing the contrary to his Highness, had now denied in presence of her counsellors having received any commission from the Queen. She also briefly gave the result of Bodman's interviews with Burghley and the others, just narrated. That agent had intimated that Parma would procure authority to treat for peace, if assured that the Queen would lend her ear to any propositions.

She replied by referring to her published declarations, as showing her powerful motives for interfering in these affairs. It was her purpose to save her own realm and to rescue her ancient neighbours from misery and from slavery. To this end she should still direct her actions, notwithstanding the sinister rumours which had been spread that she was inclined to peace before providing for the security and liberty of her allies. She was determined never to separate their cause from her own. Propositions tending to the security of herself and of her neighbours would always be favourably received.

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Parma, on his part, informed his master that there could be no doubt that the Queen and the majority of her council abhorred the war, and that already much had been gained by the fictitious negotiation. Lord-Treasurer Burghley had been interposing endless delays and difficulties in the way of every measure proposed for the relief of Lord Leicester, and the assistance rendered him had been most lukewarm. Meantime the Prince had been able, he said, to achieve much success in the field, and the English had done nothing to prevent it. Since the return of Grafigni and Bodman, however, it was obvious that the English government had disowned these non-commissioned diplomatists. The whole negotiation and all the negotiators were now discredited, but there was no doubt that there had been a strong desire to treat, and great disappointment at the result. Grafigni and Andrea de Loo had been publishing everywhere in Antwerp that England would consider the peace as made, so soon as his Majesty should be willing to accept any propositions.

His Majesty, meanwhile, sat in his cabinet, without the slightest intention of making or accepting any propositions save those that were impossible. He smiled benignantly at his nephew's dissimulation and at the good results which it had already produced. He approved of gaining time, he said, by fictitious negotiations and by the use of a mercantile agent; for, no doubt, such a course would prevent the proper succours from being sent to the Earl of Leicester. If the English would hand over to him the cautionary towns held by them in Holland and Zeeland, promise no longer to infest the seas, the Indies, and the Isles, with their corsairs, and guarantee the complete obedience to their King and submission to the holy Catholic Church of the rebellious Provinces, perhaps something might be done with them; but, on the whole, he was inclined to think that they had been influenced by knavish and deceitful motives from the beginning. He enjoined it upon Parma, therefore, to proceed with equal knavery—taking care, however, not to injure his reputation—and to enter into negotiations wherever occasion might serve, in order to put the English off their guard and to keep back the reinforcements so imperatively required by Leicester.

And the reinforcements were indeed kept back. Had Burghley and Croft been in the pay of Philip II. they could hardly have served him better than they had been doing by the course pursued. Here then is the explanation of the shortcomings of the English government towards Leicester and the States during the memorable spring and summer of 1586. No money, no soldiers, when most important operations in the field were required. The first general of the age was to be opposed by a man who had certainly never gained many laurels as a military chieftain, but who was brave and confident, and who, had he been faithfully supported by the government which sent him to the Netherlands, would have had his antagonist

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at a great disadvantage. Alexander had scarcely eight thousand effective men. Famine, pestilence, poverty, mutiny, beset and almost paralyzed him. Language could not exaggerate the absolute destitution of the country. Only miracles could save the King's cause, as Farnese repeatedly observed. A sharp vigorous campaign, heartily carried on against him by Leicester and Hohenlo, with plenty of troops and money at command, would have brought the heroic champion of Catholicism to the ground. He was hemmed in upon all sides; he was cut off from the sea; he stood as it were in a narrowing circle, surrounded by increasing dangers. His own veterans, maddened by misery, stung by their King's ingratitude, naked, starving, ferocious, were turning against him. Mucio, like his evil genius, was spiriting away his supplies just as they were reaching his hands; a threatening tempest seemed rolling up from France; the whole population of the Provinces which he had "reconciled"—a million of paupers—were crying to him for bread; great commercial cities, suddenly blasted and converted into dens of thieves and beggars, were cursing the royal author of their ruin, and uttering wild threats against his vicegerent; there seemed, in truth, nothing left for Alexander but to plunge headlong into destruction, when, lo! Mr. Comptroller Croft, advancing out of the clouds, like a propitious divinity, disguised in the garb of a foe—and the scene was changed.

The feeble old man, with his shuffling, horse-trucking servant, ex-spy of Monsieur, had accomplished more work for Philip and Alexander than many regiments of Spaniards and Walloons could have done. The arm of Leicester was paralyzed upon the very threshold of success. The picture of these palace-intrigues has been presented with minute elaboration, because, however petty and barren in appearance, they were in reality prolific of grave results. A series of victories by Parma was substituted for the possible triumphs of Elizabeth and the States.

The dissimulation of the Spanish court was fathomless. The secret correspondence of the times reveals to us that its only purpose was to deceive the Queen and her counsellors, and to gain time to prepare the grand invasion of England and subjugation of Holland—that double purpose which Philip could only abandon with life. There was never a thought, on his part, of honest negotiation. On the other hand, the Queen was sincere; Burghley and Hatton and Cobham were sincere; Croft was sincere, so far as Spain was concerned. At least they had been sincere. In the private and doleful dialogues between Bodman and Grafigni which we have just been overhearing, these intriguers spoke the truth, for they could have no wish to deceive each other, and no fear of eaves-droppers not to be born till centuries afterwards. These conversations have revealed to us that the Lord Treasurer and three of his colleagues had been secretly doing their best to cripple Leicester, to stop the supplies

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for the Netherlands, and to patch up a hurried and unsatisfactory, if not a disgraceful peace; and this, with the concurrence of her Majesty. After their plots had been discovered by the vigilant Secretary of State, there was a disposition to discredit the humbler instruments in the cabal. Elizabeth was not desirous of peace. Far from it. She was qualmish at the very suggestion. Dire was her wrath against Bodman, De Loo, Graafigni, and the rest, at their misrepresentations on the subject. But she would "lend her ear." And that royal ear was lent, and almost fatal was the distilment poured into its porches. The pith and marrow of the great Netherland enterprise was sapped by the slow poison of the ill-timed negotiation. The fruit of Drake's splendid triumphs in America was blighted by it. The stout heart of the vainglorious but courageous Leicester was sickened by it, while, meantime, the maturing of the great armada-scheme, by which the destruction of England was to be accomplished, was furthered, through the unlimited procrastination so precious to the heart of Philip.

Fortunately the subtle Walsingham was there upon the watch to administer the remedy before it was quite too late; and to him England and the Netherlands were under lasting obligations. While Alexander and Philip suspected a purpose on the part of the English government to deceive them, they could not help observing that the Earl of Leicester was both deserted and deceived. Yet it had been impossible for the peace-party in the government wholly to conceal their designs, when such prating fellows as Grafigni and De Loo were employed in what was intended to be a secret negotiation. In vain did the friends of Leicester in the Netherlands endeavour to account for the neglect with which he was treated, and for the destitution of his army. Hopelessly did they attempt to counteract those "advertisements of most fearful instance," as Richard Cavendish expressed himself, which were circulating everywhere.

Thanks to the babbling of the very men, whose chief instructions had been to hold their tongues, and to listen with all their ears, the secret negotiations between Parma and the English counsellors became the town-talk at Antwerp, the Hague, Amsterdam, Brussels, London. It is true that it was impossible to know what was actually said and done; but that there was something doing concerning which Leicester was not to be informed was certain. Grafigni, during one of his visits to the obedient provinces, brought a brace of greyhounds and a couple of horses from England, as a present to Alexander, and he perpetually went about, bragging to every one of important negotiations which he was conducting, and of his intimacy with great personages in both countries. Leicester, on the other hand, was kept in the dark. To him Grafigni made no communications, but he once sent him a dish of plums, "which," said the Earl, with superfluous energy, "I will boldly

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say to you, by the living God, is all that I have ever had since I came into these countries." When it is remembered that Leicester had spent many thousand pounds in the Netherland cause, that he had deeply mortgaged his property in order to provide more funds, that he had never received a penny of salary from the Queen, that his soldiers were "ragged and torn like rogues-pity to see them," and were left without the means of supporting life; that he had been neglected, deceived, humiliated, until he was forced to describe himself as a "forlorn man set upon a forlorn hope," it must be conceded that Grafigni's present of a dish of plums could hardly be sufficient to make him very happy.

From time to time he was enlightened by Sir Francis, who occasionally forced his adversaries' hands, and who always faithfully informed the Earl of everything he could discover. "We are so greedy of a peace, in respect of the charges of the wars," he wrote in April, "as in the procuring thereof we weigh neither honour nor safety. Somewhat here is adealing underhand, wherein there is great care taken that I should not be made acquainted withal." But with all their great care, the conspirators, as it has been seen, were sometimes outwitted by the Secretary, and, when put to the blush, were forced to take him into half-confidence. "Your Lordship may see," he wrote, after getting possession of Parma's letter to the Queen, and unravelling Croft's intrigues, "what effects are wrought by such weak ministers. They that have been the employers of them are ashamed of the matter."

Unutterable was the amazement, as we have seen, of Bodman and Grafigni when they had suddenly found themselves confronted in Burghley's private apartments in Greenwich Palace, whither they had been conducted so mysteriously after dark from the secret pavilion—by the grave Secretary of State, whom they had been so anxious to deceive; and great was the embarrassment of Croft and Cobham, and even of the imperturbable Burghley.

And thus patiently did Walsingham pick his course, plummet in hand, through the mists and along the quicksands, and faithfully did he hold out signals to his comrade embarked on the same dangerous voyage. As for the Earl himself, he was shocked at the short-sighted policy of his mistress, mortified by the neglect to which he was exposed, disappointed in his ambitious schemes. Vehemently and judiciously he insisted upon the necessity of vigorous field operations throughout the spring and summer thus frittered away in frivolous negotiations. He was for peace, if a lasting and honourable peace could be procured; but he insisted that the only road to such a result was through a "good sharp war." His troops were mutinous for want of pay, so that he had been obliged to have a few of them executed, although he protested that he would rather have "gone a thousand miles a-foot" than have done so; and he was crippled by his government at exactly the time when his great adversary's

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condition was most forlorn. Was it strange that the proud Earl should be fretting his heart away when such golden chances were eluding his grasp? He would “creep upon the ground,” he said, as far as his hands and knees would carry him, to have a good peace for her Majesty, but his care was to have a peace indeed, and not a show of it. It was the cue of Holland and England to fight before they could expect to deal upon favourable terms with their enemy. He was quick enough to see that his false colleagues at home were playing into the enemy’s hands. Victory was what was wanted; victory the Earl pledged himself, if properly seconded, to obtain; and, braggart though he was, it is by no means impossible that he might have redeemed his pledge. “If her Majesty will use her advantage,” he said, “she shall bring the King, and especially this Prince of Parma, to seek peace in other sort than by way of merchants.” Of courage and confidence the governor had no lack. Whether he was capable of outgeneralling Alexander Farnese or no, will be better seen, perhaps, in subsequent chapters; but there is no doubt that he was reasonable enough in thinking, at that juncture, that a hard campaign rather than a “merchant’s brokerage” was required to obtain an honourable peace. Lofty, indeed, was the scorn of the aristocratic Leicester that “merchants and pedlars should be paltering in so weighty a cause,” and daring to send him a dish of plums when he was hoping half a dozen regiments from the Queen; and a sorry business, in truth, the pedlars had made of it.

Never had there been a more delusive diplomacy, and it was natural that the lieutenant-general abroad and the statesman at home should be sad and indignant, seeing England drifting to utter shipwreck while pursuing that phantom of a pacific haven. Had Walsingham and himself tampered with the enemy, as some counsellors he could name had done, Leicester asserted that the gallows would be thought too good for them; and yet he hoped he might be hanged if the whole Spanish faction in England could procure for the Queen a peace fit for her to accept.

Certainly it was quite impossible for the Spanish-faction to bring about a peace. No human power could bring it about. Even if England had been willing and able to surrender Holland, bound hand and foot, to Philip, even then she could only have obtained a hollow armistice. Philip had sworn in his inmost soul the conquest of England and the dethronement of Elizabeth. His heart was fixed. It was only by the subjugation of England that he hoped to recover the Netherlands. England was to be his stepping-stone to Holland. The invasion was slowly but steadily maturing, and nothing could have diverted the King from his great purpose. In the very midst of all these plots and counterplots, Bodmans and Grafignis, English geldings and Irish greyhounds, dishes of plums and autograph letters of her Majesty and his Highness, the Prince was deliberately

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discussing all the details of the invasion, which, as it was then hoped, would be ready by the autumn of the year 1586. Although he had sent a special agent to Philip, who was to state by word of mouth that which it was deemed unsafe to write, yet Alexander, perpetually urged by his master, went at last more fully into particulars than he had ever ventured to do before; and this too at the very moment when Elizabeth was most seriously “lending her ear” to negotiation, and most vehemently expressing her wrath at Sir Thomas Heneage for dealing candidly with the States-General.

The Prince observed that when, two or three years before, he had sent his master an account of the coasts, anchoring-places, and harbours of England, he had then expressed the opinion that the conquest of England was an enterprise worthy of the grandeur and Christianity of his Majesty, and not so difficult as to be considered altogether impossible. To make himself absolutely master of the business, however, he had then thought that the King should have no associates in the scheme, and should make no account of the inhabitants of England. Since that time the project had become more difficult of accomplishment, because it was now a stale and common topic of conversation everywhere—in Italy, Germany, and France—so that there could be little doubt that rumours on the subject were daily reaching the ears of Queen Elizabeth and of every one in her kingdom. Hence she had made a strict alliance with Sweden, Denmark, the Protestant princes of Germany, and even with the Turks and the French. Nevertheless, in spite of these obstacles, the King, placing his royal hand to the work, might well accomplish the task; for the favour of the Lord, whose cause it was, would be sure to give him success.

Being so Christian and Catholic a king, Philip naturally desired to extend the area of the holy church, and to come to the relief of so many poor innocent martyrs in England, crying aloud before the Lord for help. Moreover Elizabeth had fomented rebellion in the King’s Provinces for a long time secretly, and now, since the fall of Antwerp, and just as Holland and Zeeland were falling into his grasp, openly.

Thus, in secret and in public, she had done the very worst she could do; and it was very clear that the Lord, for her sins; had deprived her of understanding, in order that his Majesty might be the instrument of that chastisement which she so fully deserved. A monarch of such great prudence, valour, and talent as Philip, could now give all the world to understand that those who dared to lose a just and decorous respect for him, as this good lady had done, would receive such chastisement as royal power guided by prudent counsel could inflict. Parma assured his sovereign, that, if the conquest of England were effected, that of the Netherlands would be finished with much facility and brevity; but that otherwise, on account of the situation, strength and obstinacy of those people, it would be a very long, perilous, and at best doubtful business.

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“Three points,” he said, “were most vital to the invasion of England— secrecy, maintenance of the civil war in France, and judicious arrangement of matters in the Provinces.”

The French, if unoccupied at home, would be sure to make the enterprise so dangerous as to become almost impossible; for it might be laid down as a general maxim that that nation, jealous of Philip’s power, had always done and would always do what it could to counteract his purposes.

With regard to the Netherlands, it would be desirable to leave a good number of troops in those countries—at least as many as were then stationed there—besides the garrisons, and also to hold many German and Swiss mercenaries in “wartgeld.” It would be further desirable that Alexander should take most of the personages of quality and sufficiency in the Provinces over with him to England, in order that they should not make mischief in his absence.

With regard to the point of secrecy, that was, in Parma’s opinion, the most important of all. All leagues must become more or less public, particularly those contrived at or with Rome. Such being the case, the Queen of England would be well aware of the Spanish projects, and, besides her militia at home, would levy German infantry and cavalry, and provide plenty of vessels, relying therein upon Holland and Zeeland, where ships and sailors were in such abundance. Moreover, the English and the Netherlands knew the coasts, currents, tides, shallows, quicksands, ports, better than did the pilots of any fleets that the King could send thither. Thus, having his back assured, the enemy would meet them in front at a disadvantage. Although, notwithstanding this inequality, the enemy would be beaten, yet if the engagement should be warm, the Spaniards would receive an amount of damage which could not fail to be inconvenient, particularly as they would be obliged to land their troops, and to give battle to those who would be watching their landing. Moreover the English would be provided with cavalry, of which his Majesty’s forces would have very little, on account of the difficulty of its embarkation.

The obedient Netherlands would be the proper place in which to organize the whole expedition. There the regiments could be filled up, provisions collected, the best way of effecting the passage ascertained, and the force largely increased without exciting suspicion; but with regard to the fleet, there were no ports there capacious enough for large vessels. Antwerp had ceased to be a seaport; but a large number of flat-bottomed barges, hoys, and other barks, more suitable for transporting soldiers, could be assembled in Dunkirk, Gravelines, and Newport, which, with some five-and-twenty larger vessels, would be sufficient to accompany the fleet.

The Queen, knowing that there were no large ships, nor ports to hold them in the obedient Provinces, would be unpropitious, if no greater levies seemed to be making than the exigencies of the Netherlands might apparently require.

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The flat-bottomed boats, drawing two or three feet of water, would be more appropriate than ships of war drawing twenty feet. The passage across, in favourable weather, might occupy from eight to twelve hours.

The number of troops for the invading force should be thirty thousand infantry, besides five hundred light troopers, with saddles, bridles, and lances, but without horses, because, in Alexander's opinion, it would be easier to mount them in England. Of these thirty thousand there should be six thousand Spaniards, six thousand Italians, six thousand Walloons, nine thousand Germans, and three thousand Burgundians.

Much money would be required; at least three hundred thousand dollars the month for the new force, besides the regular one hundred and fifty thousand for the ordinary provision in the Netherlands; and this ordinary provision would be more necessary than ever, because a mutiny breaking forth in the time of the invasion would be destruction to the Spaniards both in England and in the Provinces.

The most appropriate part of the coast for a landing would, in Alexander's opinion, be between Dover and Margate, because the Spaniards, having no footing in Holland and Zeeland, were obliged to make their starting-point in Flanders. The country about Dover was described by Parma as populous, well-wooded, and much divided by hedges; advantageous for infantry, and not requiring a larger amount of cavalry than the small force at his disposal, while the people there were domestic in their habits, rich, and therefore less warlike, less trained to arms, and more engrossed by their occupations and their comfortable ways of life. Therefore, although some encounters would take place, yet after the commanders of the invading troops had given distinct and clear orders, it would be necessary to leave the rest in the, "hands of God who governs all things, and from whose bounty and mercy it was to be hoped that He would favour a cause so eminently holy, just, and His own."

It would be necessary to make immediately for London, which city, not being fortified, would be very easily taken. This point gained, the whole framework of the business might be considered as well put together. If the Queen should fly—as, being a woman, she probably would do—everything would be left in such confusion, as, with the blessing of God, it might soon be considered that the holy and heroic work had been accomplished: Her Majesty, it was suggested, would probably make her escape in a boat before she could be captured; but the conquest would be nevertheless effected. Although, doubtless, some English troops might be got together to return and try their fortune, yet it would be quite useless; for the invaders would have already planted themselves upon the soil, and then, by means of frequent excursions and forays hither and thither about the island, all other places of importance would be gained, and the prosperous and fortunate termination of the adventure assured.

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As, however, everything was to be provided for, so, in case the secret could not be preserved, it would be necessary for Philip, under pretext of defending himself against the English and French corsairs, to send a large armada to sea, as doubtless the Queen would take the same measure. If the King should prefer, however, notwithstanding Alexander's advice to the contrary, to have confederates in the enterprise,—then, the matter being public, it would be necessary to prepare a larger and stronger fleet than any which Elizabeth, with the assistance of her French and Netherland allies, could oppose to him. That fleet should be well provided with vast stores of provisions, sufficient to enable the invading force, independently of forage, to occupy three or four places in England at once, as the enemy would be able to come from various towns and strong places to attack them.

As for the proper season for the expedition, it would be advisable to select the month of October of the current year, because the English barns would then be full of wheat and other forage, and the earth would have been sown for the next year—points of such extreme importance, that if the plan could not be executed at that time, it would be as well to defer it until the following October.

The Prince recommended that the negotiations with the League should be kept spinning, without allowing them to come to a definite conclusion; because there would be no lack of difficulties perpetually offering themselves, and the more intricate and involved the policy of France, the better it would be for the interests of Spain. Alexander expressed the utmost confidence that his Majesty, with his powerful arm, would overcome all obstacles in the path of his great project, and would show the world that he “could do a little more than what was possible.” He also assured his master, in adding in this most extravagant language, of his personal devotion, that it was unnecessary for him to offer his services in this particular enterprise, because, ever since his birth, he had dedicated and consecrated himself to execute his royal commands.

He further advised that old Peter Ernest Mansfeld should be left commander-in-chief of the forces in the Netherlands during his own absence in England. “Mansfeld was an honourable cavalier,” he said, “and a faithful servant of the King;” and although somewhat ill-conditioned at times, yet he had essential good qualities, and was the only general fit to be trusted alone.

The reader, having thus been permitted to read the inmost thoughts of Philip and Alexander, and to study their secret plans for conquering England in October, while their frivolous yet mischievous negotiations with the Queen had been going on from April to June, will be better able than before to judge whether Leicester were right or no in doubting if a good peace could be obtained by a “merchant's brokerage.”

And now, after examining these pictures of inter-aulic politics and back-stairs diplomacy, which represent so large and characteristic a phasis of European history during the year

1586, we must throw a glance at the external, more stirring, but not more significant public events which were taking place during the same period.

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ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Could do a little more than what was possible
Elizabeth, though convicted, could always confute
He sat a great while at a time. He had a genius for sitting
Mistakes might occur from occasional deviations into sincerity
Nine syllables that which could be more forcibly expressed in on
They were always to deceive every one, upon every occasion
We mustn't tickle ourselves to make ourselves laugh

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