

History of the United Netherlands, 1586e eBook

History of the United Netherlands, 1586e 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, Vol. 50

History of the United Netherlands, 1586

CHAPTER XI

Drake in the Netherlands—Good Results of his Visit—The Babington Conspiracy—Leicester decides to visit England—Exchange of parting Compliments.

Late in the autumn of the same year an Englishman arrived in the Netherlands, bearer of despatches from the Queen. He had been entrusted by her Majesty with a special mission to the States-General, and he had soon an interview with that assembly at the Hague.



He was a small man, apparently forty-five years of age, of a fair but somewhat weather-stained complexion, with light-brown, closely-curling hair, an expansive forehead, a clear blue eye, rather commonplace features, a thin, brown, pointed beard, and a slight moustache. Though low of stature, he was broad-chested, with well-knit limbs. His hands, which were small and nervous, were brown and callous with the marks of toil. There was something in his brow and glance not to be mistaken, and which men willingly call master; yet he did not seem, to have sprung of the born magnates of the earth. He wore a heavy gold chain about his neck, and it might be observed that upon the light full sleeves of his slashed doublet the image of a small ship on a terrestrial globe was curiously and many times embroidered.

It was not the first time that he had visited the Netherlands. Thirty years before the man had been apprentice on board a small lugger, which traded between the English coast and the ports of Zeeland. Emerging in early boyhood from his parental mansion—an old boat, turned bottom upwards on a sandy down he had naturally taken to the sea, and his master, dying childless not long afterwards, bequeathed to him the lugger. But in time his spirit, too much confined



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by coasting in the narrow seas, had taken a bolder flight. He had risked his hard-earned savings in a voyage with the old slave-trader, John Hawkins—whose exertions, in what was then considered an honourable and useful vocation, had been rewarded by Queen Elizabeth with her special favour, and with a coat of arms, the crest whereof was a negro's head, proper, chained—but the lad's first and last enterprise in this field was unfortunate. Captured by Spaniards, and only escaping with life, he determined to revenge himself on the whole Spanish nation; and this was considered a most legitimate proceeding according to the "sea divinity" in which he, had been schooled. His subsequent expeditions against the Spanish possessions in the West Indies were eminently successful, and soon the name of Francis Drake rang through the world, and startled Philip in the depths of his Escorial. The first Englishman, and the second of any nation, he then ploughed his memorable "furrow round the earth," carrying amazement and, destruction to the Spaniards as he sailed, and after three years brought to the Queen treasure enough, as it was asserted, to maintain a war with the Spanish King for seven years, and to pay himself and companions, and the merchant-adventurers who had participated in his enterprise, forty-seven pounds sterling for every pound invested in the voyage. The speculation had been a fortunate one both, for himself and for the kingdom.

The terrible Sea-King was one of the great types of the sixteenth century. The self-helping private adventurer, in his little vessel the 'Golden Hind,' one hundred tons burthen, had waged successful war against a mighty empire, and had shown England how to humble Philip. When he again set foot on his native soil he was followed by admiring crowds, and became the favourite hero of romance and ballad; for it was not the ignoble pursuit of gold alone, through toil and peril, which had endeared his name to the nation. The popular instinct recognized that the true means had been found at last for rescuing England and Protestantism from the overshadowing empire of Spain. The Queen visited him in his 'Golden Hind,' and gave him the honour of knighthood.

The treaty between the United Netherlands and England had been followed by an embargo upon English vessels, persons, and property, in the ports of Spain; and after five years of unwonted repose, the privateersman again set forth with twenty-five small vessels—of which five or six only were armed—under his command, conjoined with that of General Carlisle. This time the voyage was undertaken with full permission and assistance of the Queen who, however, intended to disavow him, if she should find such a step convenient. This was the expedition in which Philip Sidney had desired to take part. The Queen watched its result with intense anxiety, for the fate of her Netherland adventure was thought to be hanging on the issue. "Upon Drake's voyage, in very truth, dependeth the life and death of the cause, according to man's judgment," said Walsingham.



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The issue was encouraging, even, if the voyage—as a mercantile speculation—proved not so brilliant as the previous enterprises of Sir Francis had been. He returned in the midsummer of 1586, having captured and brandschatzed St. Domingo and Carthage; and burned St. Augustine. “A fearful man to the King of Spain is Sir Francis Drake,” said Lord Burghley. Nevertheless, the Queen and the Lord-Treasurer—as we have shown by the secret conferences at Greenwich—had, notwithstanding these successes, expressed a more earnest desire for peace than ever.

A simple, sea-faring Englishman, with half-a-dozen miserable little vessels, had carried terror, into the Spanish possessions all over the earth: but even then the great Queen had not learned to rely on the valour of her volunteers against her most formidable enemy.

Drake was, however, bent on another enterprise. The preparations for Philip’s great fleet had been going steadily forward in Lisbon, Cadiz, and other ports of Spain and Portugal, and, despite assurances to the contrary, there was a growing belief that England was to be invaded. To destroy those ships before the monarch’s face, would be, indeed, to “sing his beard.” But whose arm was daring enough for such a stroke? Whose but that of the Devonshire skipper who had already accomplished so much?

And so Sir Francis, “a man true to his word, merciful to those under him, and hating nothing so much as idleness,” had come to the Netherlands to talk over his project with the States-General, and with the Dutch merchants and sea-captains. His visit was not unfruitful. As a body the assembly did nothing; but they recommended that in every maritime city of Holland and Zeeland one or two ships should be got ready, to participate in all the future enterprises of Sir Francis and his comrades.

The martial spirit of volunteer sailors, and the keen instinct of mercantile speculation, were relied upon—exactly as in England—to furnish men, ships, and money, for these daring and profitable adventures. The foundation of a still more intimate connection between England and Holland was laid, and thenceforth Dutchmen and Englishmen fought side by side, on land and sea, wherever a blow was to be struck in the cause of human freedom against despotic Spain.

The famous Babington conspiracy, discovered by Walsingham’s “travail and cost,” had come to convince the Queen and her counsellors—if further proof were not superfluous—that her throne and life were both incompatible with Philip’s deep designs, and that to keep that monarch out of the Netherlands, was as vital to her as to keep him out of England. “She is forced by this discovery to countenance the cause by all outward means she may,” said Walsingham, “for it appeareth unto her most plain, that unless she had entered into the action, she had been utterly undone, and that if she do not prosecute the same she cannot continue.” The Secretary had sent Leicester information at an early day of the great secret, begging his friend to “make the letter a

heretic after he had read the same,” and expressing the opinion that “the matter, if well handled, would break the neck of all dangerous practices during her Majesty’s reign.”



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The tragedy of Mary Stuart—a sad but inevitable portion of the vast drama in which the emancipation of England and Holland, and, through them, of half Christendom, was accomplished—approached its catastrophe; and Leicester could not restrain his anxiety for her immediate execution. He reminded Walsingham that the great seal had been put upon a warrant for her execution for a less crime seventeen years before, on the occasion of the Northumberland and Westmorland rebellion. “For who can warrant these villains from her,” he said, “if that person live, or shall live any time? God forbid! And be you all stout and resolute in this speedy execution, or be condemned of all the world for ever. It is most certain, if you will have your Majesty safe, it must be done, for justice doth crave it beside policy.” His own personal safety was deeply compromised. “Your Lordship and I,” wrote Burghley, “were very great motives in the traitors’ eyes; for your Lordship there and I here should first, about one time, have been killed. Of your Lordship they thought rather of poisoning than slaying. After us two gone, they purposed her Majesty’s death.”

But on this great affair of state the Earl was not swayed by such personal considerations. He honestly thought—as did all the statesmen who governed England—that English liberty, the very existence of the English commonwealth, was impossible so long as Mary Stuart lived. Under these circumstances he was not impatient, for a time at least, to leave the Netherlands. His administration had not been very successful. He had been led away by his own vanity, and by the flattery of artful demagogues, but the immense obstacles with which he had to contend in the Queen’s wavering policy, and in the rivalry of both English and Dutch politicians have been amply exhibited. That he had been generous, courageous, and zealous, could not be denied; and, on the whole, he had accomplished as much in the field as could have been expected of him with such meagre forces, and so barren an exchequer.

It must be confessed, however, that his leaving the Netherlands at that moment was a most unfortunate step, both for his own reputation and for the security of the Provinces. Party-spirit was running high, and a political revolution was much to be dreaded in so grave a position of affairs, both in England and Holland. The arrangements—and particularly the secret arrangements which he made at his departure—were the most fatal measures of all; but these will be described in the following chapter.

On the 31st October; the Earl announced to the state-council his intention of returning to England, stating, as the cause of this sudden determination, that he had been summoned to attend the parliament then sitting in Westminster. Wilkes, who was of course present, having now succeeded Killigrew as one of the two English members, observed that “the States and council used but slender entreaty to his Excellency for his stay and countenance there among them, whereat his Excellency and we that were of the council for her Majesty did not a little marvel.”

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Some weeks later, however, upon the 21st November, Leicester summoned Barneveld, and five other of the States General, to discuss the necessary measures for his departure, when those gentlemen remonstrated very earnestly upon the step, pleading the danger and confusion of affairs which must necessarily ensue. The Earl declared that he was not retiring from the country because he was offended, although he had many causes for offence: and he then alluded to the, Navigation Act, to the establishment council, and spoke of the finance of Burgrave and Reingault, for his employment of which individuals so much obloquy had been heaped upon his, head. Burgrave he pronounced, as usual, a substantial, wise, faithful, religious personage, entitled to fullest confidence; while Reingault— who had been thrown into prison by the States on charges of fraud, peculation, and sedition—he declared to be a great financier, who had promised, on penalty of his head, to bring “great sums into the treasury for carrying on the war, without any burthen to the community.” Had he been able to do this, he had certainly claim to be considered the greatest of financiers; but the promised “mountains of gold” were never discovered, and Reingault was now awaiting his trial.

The deputies replied that the concessions upon the Navigation Act had satisfied the country, but that Reingault was a known instrument of the Spaniards, and Burgrave a mischief-making demagogue, who consorted with malignants, and sent slanderous reports concerning the States and the country to her Majesty. They had in consequence felt obliged to write private despatches to envoy Ortel in England, not because they suspected the Earl, but in order to counteract the calumnies of his chief advisers. They had urged the agent to bring the imprisonment of Paul Buys before her Majesty, but for that transaction Leicester boldly disclaimed all responsibility.

It was agreed between the Earl and the deputies that, during his absence, the whole government, civil and military, should devolve upon the state-council, and that Sir John Norris should remain in command of the English forces.

Two days afterwards Leicester, who knew very well that a legation was about to proceed to England, without any previous concurrence on his part, summoned a committee of the States-General, together with Barneveld, into the state-council. Counsellor Wilkes on his behalf then made a speech, in which he observed that more ample communications on the part of the States were to be expected. They had in previous colloquies touched upon comparatively unimportant matters, but he now begged to be informed why these commissioners were proceeding to England, and what was the nature of their instructions. Why did not they formally offer the sovereignty of the Provinces to the Queen without conditions? That step had already been taken by Utrecht.

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The deputies conferred apart for a little while, and then replied that the proposition made by Utrecht was notoriously factious, illegal, and altogether futile. Without the sanction of all the United States, of what value was the declaration of Utrecht? Moreover the charter of that province had been recklessly violated, its government overthrown, and its leading citizens banished. The action of the Province under such circumstances was not deserving of comment; but should it appear that her Majesty was desirous of assuming the sovereignty of the Provinces upon reasonable conditions, the States of Holland and of Zeeland would not be found backward in the business.

Leicester proposed that Prince Maurice of Nassau should go with him to England, as nominal chief of the embassy, and some of the deputies favoured the suggestion. It was however, vigorously and successfully opposed by Barneveld, who urged that to leave the country without a head in such a dangerous position of affairs, would be an act of madness. Leicester was much annoyed when informed of this decision. He was suspected of a design, during his absence, of converting Maurice entirely to his own way of thinking. If unsuccessful, it was believed by the Advocate and by many others that the Earl would cause the young Prince to be detained in England as long as Philip William, his brother, had been kept in Spain. He observed peevishly that he knew how it had all been brought about.

Words, of course, and handsome compliments were exchanged between the Governor and the States-General on his departure. He protested that he had never pursued any private ends during his administration, but had ever sought to promote the good of the country and the glory of the Queen, and that he had spent three hundred thousand florins of his own money in the brief period of his residence there.

The Advocate, on part of the States, assured him that they were all aware that in the friendship of England lay their only chance of salvation, but that united action was the sole means by which that salvation could be effected, and the one which had enabled the late Prince of Orange to maintain a contest unequalled by anything recorded in history. There was also much disquisition on the subject of finance—the Advocate observing that the States now raised as much in a month as the Provinces in the time of the Emperor used to levy in a year—and expressed the hope that the Queen would increase her contingent to ten thousand foot, and two thousand horse. He repudiated, in the name of the States-General and his own, the possibility of peace-negotiations; deprecated any allusion to the subject as fatal to their religion, their liberty, their very existence, and equally disastrous to England and to Protestantism, and implored the Earl, therefore, to use all his influence in opposition to any pacific overtures to or from Spain.

On the 24th November, acts were drawn up and signed by the Earl, according to which the supreme government of the United Netherlands was formally committed to the state-council during his absence. Decrees were to be pronounced in the name of his Excellency, and countersigned by Maurice of Nassau.



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On the following day, Leicester, being somewhat indisposed, requested a deputation of the States-General to wait upon him in his own house. This was done, and a formal and affectionate farewell was then read to him by his secretary, Mr. Atye. It was responded to in complimentary fashion by Advocate Barneveld, who again took occasion at this parting interview to impress upon the governor the utter impossibility, in his own opinion and that of the other deputies, of reconciling the Provinces with Spain.

Leicester received from the States—as a magnificent parting present—a silver gilt vase “as tall as a man,” and then departed for Flushing to take shipping for England.

CHAPTER XII.

Ill-timed Interregnum in the Provinces—Firmness of the English and Dutch People—Factions during Leicester’s Government—Democratic Theories of the Leicestrians—Suspensions as to the Earl’s Designs—Extreme Views of the Calvinists—Political Ambition of the Church—Antagonism of the Church and States—The States inclined to Tolerance—Desolation of the Obedient Provinces—Pauperism and Famine—Prosperity of the Republic—The Year of Expectation.

It was not unnatural that the Queen should desire the presence of her favourite at that momentous epoch, when the dread question, “aut fer aut feri,” had at last demanded its definite solution. It was inevitable, too, that Leicester should feel great anxiety to be upon the spot where the great tragedy, so full of fate to all Christendom, and in which his own fortunes were so closely involved, was to be enacted. But it was most cruel to the Netherlands—whose well-being was nearly as important to Elizabeth as that of her own realm—to plunge them into anarchy at such a moment. Yet this was the necessary result of the sudden retirement of Leicester.

He did not resign his government. He did not bind himself to return. The question of sovereignty was still unsettled, for it was still hoped by a large and influential party, that the English Queen would accept the proposed annexation. It was yet doubtful, whether, during the period of abeyance, the States-General or the States-Provincial, each within their separate sphere, were entitled to supreme authority. Meantime, as if here were not already sufficient elements of dissension and doubt, came a sudden and indefinite interregnum, a provisional, an abnormal, and an impotent government. To the state-council was deputed the executive authority. But the state-council was a creature of the States-General, acting in concert with the governor-general, and having no actual life of its own. It was a board of consultation, not of decision, for it could neither enact its own decrees nor interpose a veto upon the decrees of the governor.

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Certainly the selection of Leicester to fill so important a post had not been a very fortunate one; and the enthusiasm which had greeted him, "as if he had been a Messiah," on his arrival, had very rapidly dwindled away, as his personal character became known. The leading politicians of the country had already been aware of the error which they had committed in clothing with almost sovereign powers the delegate of one who had refused the sovereignty. They, were too adroit to neglect the opportunity, which her Majesty's anger offered them, of repairing what they considered their blunder. When at last the quarrel, which looked so much like a lovers' quarrel, between Elizabeth and 'Sweet Robin,' had been appeased to the satisfaction of Robin, his royal mistress became more angry with the States for circumscribing than she had before been for their exaggeration of his authority. Hence the implacable hatred of Leicester to Paul Buys and Barneveld.

Those two statesmen, for eloquence, learning, readiness, administrative faculty, surpassed by few who have ever wielded the destinies of free commonwealths, were fully equal to the task thrown upon their hands by the progress of events. That task was no slight one, for it was to the leading statesmen of Holland and England, sustained by the indomitable resistance to despotism almost universal in the English and Dutch nations, that the liberty of Europe was entrusted at that, momentous epoch. Whether united under one crown, as the Netherlands ardently desired, or closely allied for aggression and defence, the two peoples were bound indissolubly together. The clouds were rolling up from the fatal south, blacker and more portentous than ever; the artificial equilibrium of forces, by which the fate of France was kept in suspense, was obviously growing every day more uncertain; but the prolonged and awful interval before the tempest should burst over the lands of freedom and Protestantism, gave at least time for the prudent to prepare. The Armada was growing every day in the ports of Spain and Portugal, and Walsingham doubted, as little as did Buys or Barneveld, toward what shores that invasion was to be directed. England was to be conquered in order that the rebellious Netherlands might be reduced; and 'Mucio' was to be let slip upon the unhappy Henry III. so soon as it was thought probable that the Bearnese and the Valois had sufficiently exhausted each other. Philip was to reign in Paris, Amsterdam, London, and Edinburgh, without stirring from the Escorial. An excellent programme, had there not been some English gentlemen, some subtle secretaries of state, some Devonshire skippers, some Dutch advocates and merchants, some Zeeland fly-boatsmen, and six million men, women, and children, on the two sides of the North Sea, who had the power of expressing their thoughts rather bluntly than otherwise, in different dialects of old Anglo-Saxon speech.



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Certainly it would be unjust and ungracious to disparage the heroism of the great Queen when the hour of danger really came, nor would it be legitimate for us, who can scan that momentous year of expectation, 1587, by the light of subsequent events and of secret contemporaneous record, to censure or even sharply to criticise the royal hankering for peace, when peace had really become impossible. But as we shall have occasion to examine rather closely the secrets of the Spanish, French, English, and Dutch councils, during this epoch, we are likely to find, perhaps, that at least as great a debt is due to the English and Dutch people, in mass, for the preservation of European liberty at that disastrous epoch as to any sovereign, general, or statesman.

For it was in the great waters of the sixteenth century that the nations whose eyes were open, discovered the fountain of perpetual youth, while others, who were blind, passed rapidly onward to decrepitude. England was, in many respects, a despotism so far as regarded governmental forms; and no doubt the Catholics were treated with greater rigour than could be justified even by the perpetual and most dangerous machinations of the seminary priests and their instigators against the throne and life of Elizabeth. The word liberty was never musical in Tudor ears, yet Englishmen had blunt tongues and sharp weapons which rarely rusted for want of use. In the presence of a parliament, and the absence of a standing army, a people accustomed to read the Bible in the vernacular, to handle great questions of religion and government freely, and to bear arms at will, was most formidable to despotism. There was an advance on the olden time. A Francis Drake, a John Hawkins, a Roger Williams, might have been sold, under the Plantagenets, like an ox or an ass. A 'female villain' in the reign of Henry III. could have been purchased for eighteen shillings—hardly the price of a fatted pig, and not one-third the value of an ambling palfrey—and a male villain, such an one as could in Elizabeth's reign circumnavigate the globe in his own ship, or take imperial field-marshal by the beard, was worth but two or three pounds sterling in the market. Here was progress in three centuries, for the villains were now become admirals and generals in England and Holland, and constituted the main stay of these two little commonwealths, while the commanders who governed the 'invincible' fleets and armies of omnipotent Spain, were all cousins of emperors, or grandees of bluest blood. Perhaps the system of the reformation would not prove the least effective in the impending crisis.

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It was most important, then, that these two nations should be united in council, and should stand shoulder to shoulder as their great enemy advanced. But this was precisely what had been rendered almost impossible by the course of events during Leicester's year of administration, and by his sudden but not final retirement at its close. The two great national parties which had gradually been forming, had remained in a fluid state during the presence of the governor-general. During his absence they gradually hardened into the forms which they were destined to retain for centuries. In the history of civil liberty, these incessant contests, these oral and written disquisitions, these sharp concussions of opinion, and the still harder blows, which, unfortunately, were dealt on a few occasions by the combatants upon each other, make the year 1587 a memorable one. The great questions of the origin of government, the balance of dynastic forces, the distribution of powers, were dealt with by the ablest heads, both Dutch and English, that could be employed in the service of the kingdom and republic. It was a war of protocols, arguments, orations, rejoinders, apostilles, and pamphlets; very wholesome for the cause of free institutions and the intellectual progress of mankind. The reader may perhaps be surprised to see with how much vigour and boldness the grave questions which underlie all polity, were handled so many years before the days of Russell and Sidney, of Montesquieu and Locke, Franklin, Jefferson, Rousseau, and Voltaire; and he may be even more astonished to find exceedingly democratic doctrines propounded, if not believed in, by trained statesmen of the Elizabethan school. He will be also apt to wonder that a more fitting time could not be found for such philosophical debate than the epoch at which both the kingdom and the republic were called upon to strain every sinew against the most formidable and aggressive despotism that the world had known since the fall of the Roman Empire.

The great dividing-line between the two parties, that of Leicester and that of Holland, which controlled the action of the States-General, was the question of sovereignty. After the declaration of independence and the repudiation of Philip, to whom did the sovereignty belong? To the people, said the Leicestrians. To the States-General and the States-Provincial, as legitimate representatives of the people, said the Holland party. Without looking for the moment more closely into this question, which we shall soon find ably discussed by the most acute reasoners of the time, it is only important at present to make a preliminary reflection. The Earl of Leicester, of all men in the world, would seem to have been precluded by his own action, and by the action of his Queen, from taking ground against the States. It was the States who, by solemn embassy, had offered the sovereignty to Elizabeth. She had not accepted the offer, but she had deliberated on the subject,



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and certainly she had never expressed a doubt whether or not the offer had been legally made. By the States, too, that governor-generalship had been conferred upon the Earl, which had been so thankfully and eagerly accepted. It was strange, then, that he should deny the existence of the power whence his own authority was derived. If the States were not sovereigns of the Netherlands, he certainly was nothing. He was but general of a few thousand English troops.

The Leicester party, then, proclaimed extreme democratic principles as to the origin of government and the sovereignty of the people. They sought to strengthen and to make almost absolute the executive authority of their chief, on the ground that such was the popular will; and they denounced with great acrimony the insolence of the upstart members of the States, half a dozen traders, hired advocates, churls, tinkers, and the like—as Leicester was fond of designating the men who opposed him—in assuming these airs of sovereignty.

This might, perhaps, be philosophical doctrine, had its supporters not forgotten that there had never been any pretence at an expression of the national will, except through the mouths of the States. The States-General and the States-Provincial, without any usurpation, but as a matter of fact and of great political convenience, had, during fifteen years, exercised the authority which had fallen from Philip's hands. The people hitherto had acquiesced in their action, and certainly there had not yet been any call for a popular convention, or any other device to ascertain the popular will. It was also difficult to imagine what was the exact entity of this abstraction called the "people" by men who expressed such extreme contempt for "merchants, advocates, town-orators, churls, tinkers, and base mechanic men, born not to command but to obey." Who were the people when the educated classes and the working classes were thus carefully eliminated? Hardly the simple peasantry—the boors—who tilled the soil. At that day the agricultural labourers less than all others dreamed of popular sovereignty, and more than all others submitted to the mild authority of the States. According to the theory of the Netherland constitutions, they were supposed—and they had themselves not yet discovered the fallacies to which such doctrines could lead—to be represented by the nobles and country-squires who maintained in the States of each Province the general farming interests of the republic. Moreover, the number of agricultural peasants was comparatively small. The lower classes were rather accustomed to plough the sea than the land, and their harvests were reaped from that element, which to Hollanders and Zeelanders was less capricious than the solid earth. Almost every inhabitant of those sea-born territories was, in one sense or another, a mariner; for every highway was a canal; the soil was percolated by rivers and estuaries, pools and meres; the fisheries were the nurseries in which still more daring navigators rapidly learned their trade, and every child took naturally to the ocean as to its legitimate home.

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The “people,” therefore, thus enthroned by the Leicestrians over all the inhabitants of the country, appeared to many eyes rather a misty abstraction, and its claim of absolute sovereignty a doctrine almost as fantastic as that of the divine right of kings. The Netherlanders were, on the whole, a law-abiding people, preferring to conduct even a revolution according to precedent, very much attached to ancient usages and traditions, valuing the liberties, as they called them, which they had wrested from what had been superior force, with their own right hands, preferring facts to theories, and feeling competent to deal with tyrants in the concrete rather than to annihilate tyranny in the abstract by a bold and generalizing phraseology. Moreover the opponents of the Leicester party complained that the principal use to which this newly discovered “people” had been applied, was to confer its absolute sovereignty unconditionally upon one man. The people was to be sovereign in order that it might immediately abdicate in favour of the Earl.

Utrecht, the capital of the Leicestrians, had already been deprived of its constitution. The magistracy was, according to law, changed every year. A list of candidates was furnished by the retiring board, an equal number of names was added by the governor of the Province, and from the catalogue thus composed the governor with his council selected the new magistrates for the year. But De Villiers, the governor of the Province, had been made a prisoner by the enemy in the last campaign; Count Moeurs had been appointed provisional stadholder by the States; and, during his temporary absence on public affairs, the Leicestrians had seized upon the government, excluded all the ancient magistrates, banished many leading citizens from the town, and installed an entirely new board, with Gerard Proninck, called Deventer, for chief burgomaster, who was a Brabantine refugee just arrived in the Province, and not eligible to office until after ten years’ residence.

It was not unnatural that the Netherlanders, who remembered the scenes of bloodshed and disorder produced by the memorable attempt of the Duke of Anjou to obtain possession of Antwerp and other cities, should be suspicious of Leicester. Anjou, too, had been called to the Provinces by the voluntary action of the States. He too had been hailed as a Messiah and a deliverer. In him too had unlimited confidence been reposed, and he had repaid their affection and their gratitude by a desperate attempt to obtain the control of their chief cities by the armed hand, and thus to constitute himself absolute sovereign of the Netherlands. The inhabitants had, after a bloody contest, averted the intended massacre and the impending tyranny; but it was not astonishing that—so very, few years having elapsed since those tragical events—they should be inclined to scan severely the actions of the man who had already obtained by unconstitutional means the mastery of a most important city, and was supposed to harbour designs upon all the cities.

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No, doubt it was a most illiberal and unwise policy for the inhabitants of the independent States to exclude from office the wanderers, for conscience' sake, from the obedient Provinces. They should have been welcomed heart and hand by those who were their brethren in religion and in the love of freedom. Moreover, it was notorious that Hohenlo, lieutenant-general under Maurice of Nassau, was a German, and that by the treaty with England, two foreigners sat in the state council, while the army swarmed with English, Irish, and German officers in high command. Nevertheless, violently to subvert the constitution of a Province, and to place in posts of high responsibility men who were ineligible—some whose characters were suspicious, and some who were known to be dangerous, and to banish large numbers of respectable burghers—was the act of a despot.

Besides their democratic doctrines, the Leicestrians proclaimed and encouraged an exclusive and rigid Calvinism.

It would certainly be unjust and futile to detract from the vast debt which the republic owed to the Geneva Church. The reformation had entered the Netherlands by the Walloon gate. The earliest and most eloquent preachers, the most impassioned converts, the sublimest martyrs, had lived, preached, fought, suffered, and died with the precepts of Calvin in their hearts. The fire which had consumed the last vestige of royal and sacerdotal despotism throughout the independent republic, had been lighted by the hands of Calvinists.

Throughout the blood-stained soil of France, too, the men who were fighting the same great battle as were the Netherlanders against Philip II. and the Inquisition, the valiant cavaliers of Dauphiny and Provence, knelt on the ground, before the battle, smote their iron breasts with their mailed hands, uttered a Calvinistic prayer, sang a psalm of Marot, and then charged upon Guise, or upon Joyeuse, under the white plume of the Bearnese. And it was on the Calvinist weavers and clothiers of Rochelle that the great Prince relied in the hour of danger as much as on his mountain chivalry. In England too, the seeds of liberty, wrapped up in Calvinism and hoarded through many trying years, were at last destined to float over land and sea, and to bear large harvests of temperate freedom for great commonwealths, which were still unborn. Nevertheless there was a growing aversion in many parts of the States for the rigid and intolerant spirit of the reformed religion. There were many men in Holland who had already imbibed the true lesson—the only, one worth learning of the reformation—liberty of thought; but toleration in the eyes of the extreme Calvinistic party was as great a vice as it could be in the estimation of Papists. To a favoured few of other habits of thought, it had come to be regarded as a virtue; but the day was still far distant when men were to scorn the very word toleration as an insult to the dignity of man; as if for any human being or set of human beings, in caste, class, synod, or church, the right could even in imagination be conceded of controlling the consciences of their fellow-creatures.

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But it was progress for the sixteenth century that there were individuals, and prominent individuals, who dared to proclaim liberty of conscience for all. William of Orange was a Calvinist, sincere and rigid, but he denounced all oppression of religion, and opened wide the doors of the Commonwealth to Papists, Lutherans, and Anabaptists alike. The Earl of Leicester was a Calvinist, most rigid in tenet, most edifying of conversation, the acknowledged head of the Puritan party of England, but he was intolerant and was influenced only by the most intolerant of his sect. Certainly it would have required great magnanimity upon his part to assume a friendly demeanour towards the Papists. It is easier for us, in more favoured ages, to rise to the heights of philosophical abstraction, than for a man, placed as was Leicester, in the front rank of a mighty battle, in which the triumph of either religion seemed to require the bodily annihilation of all its adversaries. He believed that the success of a Catholic conspiracy against the life of Elizabeth or of a Spanish invasion of England, would raise Mary to the throne and consign himself to the scaffold. He believed that the subjugation of the independent Netherlands would place the Spaniards instantly in England, and he frequently received information, true or false, of Popish plots that were ever hatching in various parts of the Provinces against the English Queen. It was not surprising, therefore, although it was unwise, that he should incline his ear most seriously to those who counselled severe measures not only against Papists, but against those who were not persecutors of Papists, and that he should allow himself to be guided by adventurers, who wore the mask of religion only that they might plunder the exchequer and rob upon the highway.

Under the administration of this extreme party, therefore, the Papists were maltreated, disfranchised, banished, and plundered. The distribution of the heavy war-taxes, more than two-thirds of which were raised in Holland only, was confided to foreigners, and regulated mainly at Utrecht, where not one-tenth part of the same revenue was collected. This naturally excited the wrath of the merchants and manufacturers of Holland and the other Provinces, who liked not that these hard-earned and lavishly-paid subsidies should be meddled with by any but the cleanest hands.

The clergy, too, arrogated a direct influence in political affairs. Their demonstrations were opposed by the anti-Leicestrians, who cared not to see a Geneva theocracy in the place of the vanished Papacy. They had as little reverence in secular affairs for Calvinistic deacons as for the college of cardinals, and would as soon accept the infallibility of Sixtus V. as that of Herman Modet. The reformed clergy who had dispossessed and confiscated the property of the ancient ecclesiastics who once held a constitutional place in the Estates of Utrecht—although many of those individuals were now married and had embraced the reformed religion who had demolished, and sold at public auction, for 12,300 florins, the time-honoured cathedral where the earliest Christians of the Netherlands had worshipped, and St. Willibrod had ministered, were roundly rebuked, on more than one occasion, by the blunt matters beyond their sphere.

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The party of the States-General, as opposed to the Leicester party, was guided by the statesmen of Holland. At a somewhat later period was formed the States-right party, which claimed sovereignty for each Province, and by necessary consequence the hegemony throughout the confederacy, for Holland. At present the doctrine maintained was that the sovereignty forfeited by Philip had naturally devolved upon the States-General. The statesmen of this party repudiated the calumny that it had therefore lapsed into the hands of half a dozen mechanics and men of low degree. The States of each Province were, they maintained, composed of nobles and country-gentlemen, as representing the agricultural interest, and of deputies from the 'vroedschappen,' or municipal governments, of every city and smallest town.

Such men as Adrian Van der Werff, the heroic burgomaster of Leyden during its famous siege, John Van der Does, statesman, orator, soldier, poet, Adolphus Meetkerke, judge, financier, politician, Carl Roorda, Noel de Carom diplomatist of most signal ability, Floris Thin, Paul Buys, and Olden-Barneveld, with many others, who would have done honour to the legislative assemblies and national councils in any country or any age, were constantly returned as members of the different vroedschaps in the commonwealth.

So far from its being true then that half a dozen ignorant mechanics had usurped the sovereignty of the Provinces, after the abjuration of the Spanish King, it may be asserted in general terms, that of the eight hundred thousand inhabitants of Holland at least eight hundred persons were always engaged in the administration of public affairs, that these individuals were perpetually exchanged for others, and that those whose names became most prominent in the politics of the day were remarkable for thorough education, high talents, and eloquence with tongue and pen. It was acknowledged by the leading statesmen of England and France, on repeated occasions throughout the sixteenth century, that the diplomatists and statesmen of the Netherlands were even more than a match for any politicians who were destined to encounter them, and the profound respect which Leicester expressed for these solid statesmen, these "substantial, wise, well-linguaged" men, these "big fellows," so soon as he came in contact with them, and before he began to hate them for outwitting him, has already appeared. They were generally men of the people, born without any of the accidents of fortune; but, the leaders had studied in the common schools, and later in the noble universities of a land where to be learned and eloquent was fast becoming almost as great an honour as to be wealthy or high born.

The executive, the legislative, and the judiciary departments were more carefully and scientifically separated than could perhaps have been expected in that age. The lesser municipal courts, in which city-senators presided, were subordinate to the supreme court of Holland, whose officers were appointed by the stadholders and council; the supplies were in the hands of the States-Provincial, and the supreme administrative authority was confided to a stadholder appointed by the states.

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The States-General were constituted of similar materials to those of which the States-Provincial were constructed, and the same individuals were generally prominent in both. They were deputies appointed by the Provincial Estates, were in truth rather more like diplomatic envoys than senators, were generally bound very strictly by instructions, and were often obliged, by the jealousy springing from the States-right principle, to refer to their constituents, on questions when the times demanded a sudden decision, and when the necessary delay was inconvenient and dangerous.

In religious matters, the States-party, to their honour, already leaned to a wide toleration. Not only Catholics were not burned, but they were not banished, and very large numbers remained in the territory, and were quite undisturbed in religious matters, within their own doors. There were even men employed in public affairs who were suspected of papistical tendencies, although their hostility, to Spain and their attachment to their native land could not fairly be disputed. The leaders of the States-party had a rooted aversion to any political influence on the part of the clergy of any denomination whatever. Disposed to be lenient to all forms of worship, they were disinclined to an established church, but still more opposed to allowing church-influence in secular affairs. As a matter of course, political men with such bold views in religious matters were bitterly assailed by their rigid opponents. Barneveld, with his "nil scire tutissima fides," was denounced as a disguised Catholic or an infidel, and as for Paul Buys, he was a "bolsterer of Papists, an atheist, a devil," as it has long since been made manifest.

Nevertheless these men believed that they understood the spirit of their country and of the age. In encouragement to an expanding commerce, the elevation and education of the masses, the toleration of all creeds, and a wide distribution of political functions and rights, they looked for the salvation of their nascent republic from destruction, and the maintenance of the true interests of the people. They were still loyal to Queen Elizabeth, and desirous that she should accept the sovereignty of the Provinces. But they were determined that the sovereignty should be a constitutional one, founded upon and limited by the time-honoured laws and traditions of their commonwealth; for they recognised the value of a free republic with an hereditary chief, however anomalous it might in theory appear. They knew that in Utrecht the Leicestrian party were about to offer the Queen the sovereignty of their Province, without conditions, but they were determined that neither Queen Elizabeth nor any other monarch should ever reign in the Netherlands, except under conditions to be very accurately defined and well secured.

Thus, contrasted, then, were the two great parties in the Netherlands, at the conclusion of Leicester's first year of administration. It may easily be understood that it was not an auspicious moment to leave the country without a chief.

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The strength of the States-party lay in Holland, Zeeland, Friesland. The main stay of the democratic or Leicester faction was in the city of Utrecht, but the Earl had many partizans in Gelderland, Friesland, and in Overysse, the capital of which Province, the wealthy and thriving Deventer, second only in the republic to Amsterdam for commercial and political importance, had been but recently secured for the Provinces by the vigorous measures of Sir William Pelham.

The condition of the republic and of the Spanish Provinces was, at that moment, most signally contrasted. If the effects of despotism and of liberty could ever be exhibited at a single glance, it was certainly only necessary to look for a moment at the picture of the obedient and of the rebel Netherlands.

Since the fall of Antwerp, the desolation of Brabant, Flanders, and of the Walloon territories had become complete. The King had recovered the great commercial capital, but its commerce was gone. The Scheldt, which, till recently, had been the chief mercantile river in the world, had become as barren as if its fountains had suddenly dried up. It was as if it no longer flowed to the ocean, for its mouth was controlled by Flushing. Thus Antwerp was imprisoned and paralyzed. Its docks and basins, where 2500 ships had once been counted, were empty, grass was growing in its streets, its industrious population had vanished, and the Jesuits had returned in swarms. And the same spectacle was presented by Ghent, Bruges, Valenciennes, Tournay, and those other fair cities, which had once been types of vigorous industry and tumultuous life. The sea-coast was in the hands of two rising commercial powers, the great and free commonwealths of the future. Those powers were acting in concert, and commanding the traffic of the world, while the obedient Provinces were excluded from all foreign intercourse and all markets, as the result of their obedience. Commerce, manufactures, agriculture; were dying lingering deaths. The thrifty farms, orchards, and gardens, which had been a proverb and wonder of industry were becoming wildernesses. The demand for their produce by the opulent and thriving cities, which had been the workshops of the world, was gone. Foraging bands of Spanish and Italian mercenaries had succeeded to the famous tramp of the artizans and mechanics, which had often been likened to an army, but these new customers were less profitable to the gardeners and farmers. The clothiers, the fullers, the tapestry-workers, the weavers, the cutlers, had all wandered away, and the cities of Holland, Friesland, and of England, were growing skilful and rich by the lessons and the industry of the exiles to whom they afforded a home. There were villages and small towns in the Spanish Netherlands that had been literally depopulated. Large districts of country had gone to waste, and cane-brakes and squalid morasses usurped the place of yellow harvest-fields.



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The fog, the wild boar, and the wolf, infested the abandoned homes of the peasantry; children could not walk in safety in the neighbourhood even of the larger cities; wolves littered their young in the deserted farm-houses; two hundred persons, in the winter of 1586-7, were devoured by wild beasts in the outskirts of Ghent. Such of the remaining labourers and artisans as had not been converted into soldiers, found their most profitable employment as brigands, so that the portion of the population spared by war and emigration was assisting the enemy in preying upon their native country. Brandschatzung, burglary, highway-robbery, and murder, had become the chief branches of industry among the working classes. Nobles and wealthy burghers had been changed to paupers and mendicants. Many a family of ancient lineage, and once of large possessions, could be seen begging their bread, at the dusk of evening, in the streets of great cities, where they had once exercised luxurious hospitality; and they often begged in vain.

For while such was the forlorn aspect of the country—and the portrait, faithfully sketched from many contemporary pictures, has not been exaggerated in any of its dark details—a great famine smote the land with its additional scourge. The whole population, soldiers and brigands, Spaniards and Flemings, beggars and workmen, were in danger of perishing together. Where the want of employment had been so great as to cause a rapid depopulation, where the demand for labour had almost entirely ceased, it was a necessary result, that during the process, prices should be low, even in the presence of foreign soldiery, and despite the inflated profits, which such capitalists as remained required, by way not only of profit but insurance, in such troublous times. Accordingly, for the last year or two, the price of rye at Antwerp and Brussels had been one florin for the veertel (three bushels) of one hundred and twenty pounds; that of wheat, about one-third of a florin more. Five pounds of rye, therefore, were worth, one penny sterling, reckoning, as was then usual, two shillings to the florin. A pound weight of wheat was worth about one farthing. Yet this was forty-one years after the discovery of the mines of Potosi (A.D. 1545), and full sixteen years after the epoch; from which is dated that rapid fall in the value of silver, which in the course of seventy years, caused the average price of corn and of all other commodities, to be tripled or even quadrupled. At that very moment the average cost of wheat in England was sixty-four shillings the quarter, or about seven and sixpence sterling the bushel, and in the markets of Holland, which in truth regulated all others, the same prices prevailed. A bushel of wheat in England was equal therefore to eight bushels in Brussels.



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Thus the silver mines, which were the Spanish King's property, had produced their effect everywhere more signally than within the obedient Provinces. The South American specie found its way to Philip's coffers, thence to the paymasters of his troops in Flanders, and thence to the commercial centres of Holland and England. Those countries, first to feel and obey the favourable expanding impulse of the age, were moving surely and steadily on before it to greatness. Prices were rising with unexampled rapidity, the precious metals were comparatively a drug, a world-wide commerce, such as had never been dreamed of, had become an every-day concern, the arts and sciences and a most generous culture in famous schools and universities, which had been founded in the midst of tumult and bloodshed, characterized the republic, and the golden age of English poetry, which was to make the Elizabethan era famous through all time, had already begun.

In the Spanish Netherlands the newly-found treasure served to pay the only labourers required in a subjugated and almost deserted country, the pikemen of Spain and Italy, and the reiters of Germany. Prices could not sustain themselves in the face of depopulation. Where there was no security for property, no home-market, no foreign intercourse, industrial pursuits had become almost impossible. The small demand for labour had caused it, as it were, to disappear, altogether. All men had become beggars, brigands, or soldiers. A temporary reaction followed. There were no producers. Suddenly it was discovered that no corn had been planted, and that there was no harvest. A famine was the inevitable result. Prices then rose with most frightful rapidity. The veertel of rye, which in the previous year had been worth one florin at Brussels and Antwerp, rose in the winter of 1586-7 to twenty, twenty-two, and even twenty-four florins; and wheat advanced from one and one-third florin to thirty-two florins the veertel. Other articles were proportionally increased in market-value; but it is worthy of remark that mutton was quoted in the midst of the famine at nine stuyvers (a little more than ninepence sterling) the pound, and beef at fivepence, while a single cod-fish sold for twenty-two florins. Thus wheat was worth sixpence sterling the pound weight (reckoning the veertel of one hundred and twenty pounds at thirty florins), which was a penny more than the price of a pound of beef; while an ordinary fish was equal in value to one hundred and six pounds of beef. No better evidence could be given that the obedient Provinces were relapsing into barbarism, than that the only agricultural industry then practised was to allow what flocks and herds were remaining to graze at will over the ruined farms and gardens, and that their fishermen were excluded from the sea.

The evil cured itself, however, and, before the expiration of another year, prices were again at their previous level. The land was sufficiently cultivated to furnish the necessaries of life for a diminishing population, and the supply of labour was more than enough, for the languishing demand. Wheat was again at tenpence the bushel, and other commodities valued in like proportion, and far below the market-prices in Holland and England.



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On the other, hand, the prosperity of the republic was rapidly increasing. Notwithstanding the war, which had been raging for a terrible quarter of a century without any interruption, population was increasing, property rapidly advancing in value, labour in active demand. Famine was impossible to a state which commanded the ocean. No corn grew in Holland and Zeeland, but their ports were the granary of the world. The fisheries were a mine of wealth almost equal to the famous Potosi, with which the commercial world was then ringing. Their commerce with the Baltic nations was enormous. In one month eight hundred vessels left their havens for the eastern ports alone. There was also no doubt whatever—and the circumstance was a source of constant complaint and of frequent ineffective legislation—that the rebellious Provinces were driving a most profitable trade with Spain and the Spanish possessions, in spite of their revolutionary war. The mines of Peru and Mexico were as fertile for the Hollanders and Zeelanders as for the Spaniards themselves. The war paid for the war, one hundred large frigates were constantly cruising along the coasts to protect the fast-growing traffic, and an army of twenty thousand foot soldiers and two thousand cavalry were maintained on land. There were more ships and sailors at that moment in Holland and Zeeland than in the whole kingdom of England.

While the sea-ports were thus rapidly increasing in importance, the towns in the interior were advancing as steadily. The woollen manufacture, the tapestry, the embroideries of Gelderland, and Friesland, and Overijssel, were becoming as famous as had been those of Tournay, Ypres, Brussels, and Valenciennes. The emigration from the obedient Provinces and from other countries was very great. It was difficult to obtain lodgings in the principal cities; new houses, new streets, new towns, were rising every day. The single Province of Holland furnished regularly, for war-expenses alone, two millions of florins (two hundred thousand pounds) a year, besides frequent extraordinary grants for the same purpose, yet the burthen imposed upon the vigorous young commonwealth seemed only to make it the more elastic. “The coming generations may see,” says a contemporary historian, “the fortifications erected at that epoch in the cities, the costly and magnificent havens, the docks, the great extension of the cities; for truly the war had become a great benediction to the inhabitants.” Such a prosperous commonwealth as this was not a prize to be lightly thrown away. There is no doubt whatever that a large majority of the inhabitants, and of the States by whom the people were represented, ardently and affectionately desired to be annexed to the English crown. Leicester had become unpopular, but Elizabeth was adored, and there was nothing unreasonable in the desire entertained by the Provinces of retaining their ancient constitutions, and of transferring their allegiance to the English Queen.



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But the English Queen could not resolve to take the step. Although the great tragedy which was swiftly approaching its inevitable catastrophe, the execution of the Scottish Queen, was to make peace with Philip impossible—even if it were imaginable before—Elizabeth, during the year 1587, was earnestly bent on peace. This will be made manifest in subsequent pages, by an examination of the secret correspondence of the court. Her most sagacious statesmen disapproved her course, opposed it, and were often overruled, although never convinced; for her imperious will would have its way.

The States-General loathed the very name of peace with Spain. The people loathed it. All knew that peace with Spain meant the exchange of a thriving prosperous commonwealth, with freedom of religion, constitutional liberty, and self-government, for provincial subjection to the inquisition and to despotism: To dream of any concession from Philip on the religious point was ridiculous. There was a mirror ever held up before their eyes by the obedient Provinces, in which they might see their own image, should, they too return to obedience. And there was never a pretence, on the part of any honest adviser of Queen Elizabeth in the Netherlands, whether Englishman or Hollander, that the idea of peace-negotiation could be tolerated for a moment by States or people. Yet the sum of the Queen's policy, for the year 1587, may be summed up in one word—peace; peace for the Provinces, peace for herself, with their implacable enemy.

In France, during the same year of expectation, we shall see the long prologue to the tragic and memorable 1588 slowly enacting; the same triangular contest between the three Henrys and their partizans still proceeding. We shall see the misguided and wretched Valois lamenting over his victories, and rejoicing over his defeats; forced into hollow alliance with his deadly enemy; arrayed in arms against his only protector and the true champion of the realm; and struggling vainly in the toils of his own mother and his own secretary of state, leagued with his most powerful foes. We shall see 'Mucio,' with one 'hand extended in mock friendship toward the King, and with the other thrust backward to grasp the purse of 300,000 crowns held forth to aid his fellow-conspirator's dark designs against their common victim; and the Bearnese, ever with lance in rest, victorious over the wrong antagonist, foiled of the fruits of victory, proclaiming himself the English Queen's devoted knight, but railing at her parsimony; always in the saddle, always triumphant, always a beggar, always in love, always cheerful, and always confident to outwit the Guises and Philip, Parma and the Pope.

And in Spain we shall have occasion to look over the King's shoulder, as he sits at his study-table, in his most sacred retirement; and we shall find his policy for the year 1587 summed up in two words—invasion of England. Sincerely and ardently as Elizabeth meant peace with Philip, just so sincerely did Philip intend war with England, and the dethronement and destruction of the Queen. To this great design all others were now subservient, and it was mainly on account of this determination that there was sufficient leisure in the republic for the Leicestrians and the States-General to fight out so thoroughly their party-contests.

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ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Acknowledged head of the Puritan party of England (Leicester)
Geneva theocracy in the place of the vanished Papacy
Hankering for peace, when peace had really become impossible
Hating nothing so much as idleness
Mirror ever held up before their eyes by the obedient Provinces
Rigid and intolerant spirit of the reformed religion
Scorn the very word toleration as an insult
The word liberty was never musical in Tudor ears

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