

History of the United Netherlands, 1587c eBook

History of the United Netherlands, 1587c by John Lothrop Motley

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Contents

History of the United Netherlands, 1587c eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Page 1.....	4
Page 2.....	6
Page 3.....	7
Page 4.....	8
Page 5.....	9
Page 6.....	11
Page 7.....	12
Page 8.....	13
Page 9.....	14
Page 10.....	15
Page 11.....	17
Page 12.....	18
Page 13.....	20
Page 14.....	21
Page 15.....	22
Page 16.....	23
Page 17.....	25
Page 18.....	27
Page 19.....	29
Page 20.....	30
Page 21.....	32



Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
Title: History of the United Netherlands, 1587		1
MOTLEY'S HISTORY OF THE NETHERLANDS, Project Gutenberg Edition, Vol. 53		1
CHAPTER XVI.		1
ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:		16
Information about Project Gutenberg (one page)		17
(Three Pages)		18



Page 1

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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. 53

History of the United Netherlands, 1587

CHAPTER XVI.

Situation of Sluys—Its Dutch and English Garrison—Williams writes from Sluys to the Queen—Jealousy between the Earl and States— Schemes to relieve Sluys—Which are feeble and unsuccessful—The Town Capitulates—Parma enters—Leicester enraged—The Queen angry with the Anti-Leicestrians—Norris, Wilkes, and Buckhurst punished—Drake sails for Spain—His Exploits at Cadiz and Lisbon—He is rebuked by Elizabeth.

When Dante had passed through the third circle of the Inferno—a desert of red-hot sand, in which lay a multitude of victims of divine wrath, additionally tortured by an ever-descending storm of fiery flakes—he was led by Virgil out of this burning wilderness along a narrow causeway. This path was protected, he said, against the showers of



flame, by the lines of vapour which rose eternally from a boiling brook. Even by such shadowy bulwarks, added the poet, do the Flemings between Kadzand and Bruges protect their land against the ever-threatening sea.

It was precisely among these slender dykes between Kadzand and Bruges that Alexander Farnese had now planted all the troops that he could muster in the field. It was his determination to conquer the city of Sluys; for the possession of that important sea-port was necessary for him as a basis for the invasion of England, which now occupied all the thoughts of his sovereign and himself.

Exactly opposite the city was the island of Kadzand, once a fair and fertile territory, with a city and many flourishing villages upon its surface, but at that epoch diminished to a small dreary sand-bank by the encroachments of the ocean.



Page 2

A stream of inland water, rising a few leagues to the south of Sluys, divided itself into many branches just before reaching the city, converted the surrounding territory into a miniature archipelago—the islands of which were shifting treacherous sand-banks at low water, and submerged ones at flood—and then widening and deepening into a considerable estuary, opened for the city a capacious harbour, and an excellent although intricate passage to the sea. The city, which was well built and thriving, was so hidden in its labyrinth of canals and streamlets, that it seemed almost as difficult a matter to find Sluys as to conquer it. It afforded safe harbour for five hundred large vessels; and its possession, therefore, was extremely important for Parma. Besides these natural defences, the place was also protected by fortifications; which were as well constructed as the best of that period. There was a strong rampire and many towers. There was also a detached citadel of great strength, looking towards the sea, and there was a ravelin, called St. Anne's, looking in the direction of Bruges. A mere riband of dry land in that quarter was all of solid earth to be found in the environs of Sluys.

The city itself stood upon firm soil, but that soil had been hollowed into a vast system of subterranean magazines, not for warlike purposes, but for cellars, as Sluys had been from a remote period the great entrepot of foreign wines in the Netherlands.

While the eternal disputes between Leicester and the States were going on both in Holland and in England, while the secret negotiations between Alexander Farnese and Queen slowly proceeding at Brussels and Greenwich, the Duke, notwithstanding the destitute condition of his troops, and the famine which prevailed throughout the obedient Provinces, had succeeded in bringing a little army of five thousand foot, and something less than one thousand horse, into the field. A portion of this force he placed under the command of the veteran La Motte. That distinguished campaigner had assured the commander-in-chief that the reduction of the city would be an easy achievement. Alexander soon declared that the enterprise was the most difficult one that he had ever undertaken. Yet, two years before, he had carried to its triumphant conclusion the famous siege of Antwerp. He stationed his own division upon the isle of Kadzand, and strengthened his camp by additionally fortifying those shadowy bulwarks, by which the island, since the age of Dante, had entrenched itself against the assaults of ocean.

On the other hand, La Motte, by the orders of his chief, had succeeded, after a sharp struggle, in carrying the fort of St. Anne. A still more important step was the surprising of Blankenburg, a small fortified place on the coast, about midway between Ostend and Sluys, by which the sea-communications with the former city for the relief of the beleaguered town were interrupted.



Page 3

Parma's demonstrations against Sluys had commenced in the early days of June. The commandant of the place was Arnold de Groenevelt, a Dutch noble of ancient lineage and approved valour. His force was, however, very meagre, hardly numbering more than eight hundred, all Netherlanders, but counting among its officers several most distinguished personages—Nicholas de Maulde, Adolphus de Meetkerke and his younger brother, Captain Heraugiere, and other well-known partisans.

On the threatening of danger the commandant had made application to Sir William Russell, the worthy successor of Sir Philip Sidney in the government of Flushing. He had received from him, in consequence, a reinforcement of eight hundred English soldiers, under several eminent chieftains, foremost among whom were the famous Welshman Roger Williams, Captain Huntley, Baskerville, Sir Francis Vere, Ferdinando Gorges, and Captain Hart. This combined force, however, was but a slender one; there being but sixteen hundred men to protect two miles and a half of rampart, besides the forts and ravelins.

But, such as it was, no time was lost in vain regrets. The sorties against the besiegers were incessant and brilliant. On one occasion Sir Francis Vere—conspicuous in the throng, in his red mantilla, and supported only by one hundred Englishmen and Dutchmen, under Captain Baskerville—held at bay eight companies of the famous Spanish legion called the Terzo Veijo, at push of pike, took many prisoners, and forced the Spaniards from the position in which they were entrenching themselves. On the other hand, Farnese declared that he had never in his life witnessed anything so unflinching as the courage of his troops; employed as they were in digging trenches where the soil was neither land nor water, exposed to inundation by the suddenly-opened sluices, to a plunging fire from the forts, and to perpetual hand-to-hand combats with an active and fearless foe, and yet pumping away in the coffer-dams—which they had invented by way of obtaining a standing-ground for their operations—as steadily and sedately as if engaged in purely pacific employments. The besieged here inspired by a courage equally remarkable. The regular garrison was small enough, but the burghers were courageous, and even the women organized themselves into a band of pioneers. This corps of Amazons, led by two female captains, rejoicing in the names of 'May in the Heart' and 'Catherine the Rose,' actually constructed an important redoubt between the citadel and the rampart, which received, in compliment to its builders, the appellation of 'Fort Venus.'

The demands of the beleaguered garrison, however, upon the States and upon Leicester were most pressing. Captain Hart swam thrice out of the city with letters to the States, to the governor-general, and to Queen Elizabeth; and the same perilous feat was performed several times by a Netherland officer. The besieged meant to sell their lives dearly, but it was obviously impossible for them, with so slender a force, to resist a very long time.



Page 4

“Our ground is great and our men not so many,” wrote Roger Williams to his sovereign, “but we trust in God and our valour to defend it We mean, with God’s help, to make their downs red and black, and to let out every acre of our ground for a thousand of their lives, besides our own.”

The Welshman was no braggart, and had proved often enough that he was more given to performances than promises. “We doubt not your Majesty will succour us,” he said, “for our honest mind and plain dealing toward your royal person and dear country;” adding, as a bit of timely advice, “Royal Majesty, believe not over much your peacemakers. Had they their mind, they will not only undo your friend’s abroad, but, in the end, your royal estate.”

Certainly it was from no want of wholesome warning from wise statesmen and blunt soldiers that the Queen was venturing into that labyrinth of negotiation which might prove so treacherous. Never had been so inopportune a moment for that princess to listen to the voice of him who was charming her so wisely, while he was at the same moment battering the place, which was to be the basis of his operations against her realm. Her delay in sending forth Leicester, with at least a moderate contingent, to the rescue, was most pernicious. The States—ignorant of the Queen’s exact relations with Spain, and exaggerating her disingenuousness into absolute perfidy became on their own part exceedingly to blame. There is no doubt whatever that both Hollanders and English men were playing into the hands of Parma as adroitly as if he had actually directed their movements. Deep were the denunciations of Leicester and his partisans by the States’ party, and incessant the complaints of the English and Dutch troops shut up in Sluys against the inactivity or treachery of Maurice and Hohenlo.

“If Count Maurice and his base brother, the Admiral (Justinus de Nassau), be too young to govern, must Holland and Zeeland lose their countries and towns to make them expert men of war?” asked Roger Williams.’ A pregnant question certainly, but the answer was, that by suspicion and jealousy, rather than by youth and inexperience, the arms were paralyzed which should have saved the garrison. “If these base fellows (the States) will make Count Hollock their instrument,” continued the Welshman; “to cover and maintain their folly and lewd dealing, is it necessary for her royal Majesty to suffer it? These are too great matters to be rehearsed by me; but because I am in the town, and do resolve to, sign with my blood my duty in serving my sovereign and country, I trust her Majesty will pardon me.” Certainly the gallant adventurer on whom devolved at least half the work of directing the defence of the city, had a right to express his opinions. Had he known the whole truth, however, those opinions would have been modified. And he wrote amid the smoke and turmoil of daily and nightly battle.



Page 5

"Yesterday was the fifth sally we made," he observed: "Since I followed the wars I never saw valianter captains, nor willinger soldiers. At eleven o'clock the enemy entered the ditch of our fort, with trenches upon wheels, artillery-proof. We sallied out, recovered their trenches, slew the governor of Dam, two Spanish captains, with a number of others, repulsed them into their artillery, kept the ditch until yesternight, and will recover it, with God's help, this night, or else pay dearly for it I care not what may become of me in this world, so that her Majesty's honour,—with the rest of honourable good friends, will think me an honest man."

No one ever doubted the simple-hearted Welshman's honesty, any more than his valour; but he confided in the candour of others who were somewhat more sophisticated than himself. When he warned her, royal Majesty against the peace-makers, it was impossible for him to know that the great peace-maker was Elizabeth herself.

After the expiration of a month the work had become most fatiguing. The enemy's trenches had been advanced close to the ramparts, and desperate conflicts were of daily occurrence. The Spanish mines, too, had been pushed forward towards the extensive wine-caverns below the city, and the danger of a vast explosion or of a general assault from beneath their very feet, seemed to the inhabitants imminent. Eight days long, with scarcely an intermission, amid those sepulchral vaults, dimly-lighted with torches, Dutchmen, Englishmen, Spaniards, Italians, fought hand to hand, with pike, pistol, and dagger, within the bowels of the earth.

Meantime the operations of the States were not commendable. The ineradicable jealousy between the Leicestrians and the Barneveldians had done its work. There was no hearty effort for the relief of Sluys. There were suspicions that, if saved, the town would only be taken possession of by the Earl of Leicester, as an additional vantage-point for coercing the country into subjection to his arbitrary authority. Perhaps it would be transferred to Philip by Elizabeth as part of the price for peace. There was a growing feeling in Holland and Zeeland that as those Provinces bore all the expense of the war, it was an imperative necessity that they should limit their operations to the defence of their own soil. The suspicions as to the policy of the English government were sapping the very foundations of the alliance, and there was small disposition on the part of the Hollanders, therefore, to protect what remained of Flanders, and thus to strengthen the hands of her whom they were beginning to look upon as an enemy.

Maurice and Hohenlo made, however, a foray into Brabant, by way of diversion to the siege of Sluys, and thus compelled Farnese to detach a considerable force under Haultepenne into that country, and thereby to weaken himself. The expedition of Maurice was not unsuccessful. There was some sharp skirmishing between Hohenlo and Haultepenne, in which the latter, one of the most valuable and distinguished generals on the royal side, was defeated and slain; the fort of Engel, near Bois-le-Duc, was taken, and that important city itself endangered; but, on the other hand, the

contingent on which Leicester relied from the States to assist in relieving Sluys was not forthcoming.



Page 6

For, meantime, the governor-general had at last been sent back by his sovereign to the post which he had so long abandoned. Leaving Leicester House on the 4th July (N. S.), he had come on board the fleet two days afterwards at Margate. He was bringing with him to the Netherlands three thousand fresh infantry, and thirty thousand pounds, of which sum fifteen thousand pounds had been at last wrung from Elizabeth as an extra loan, in place of the sixty thousand pounds which the States had requested. As he sailed past Ostend and towards Flushing, the Earl was witness to the constant cannonading between the besieged city and the camp of Farnese, and saw that the work could hardly be more serious; for in one short day more shots were fired than had ever been known before in a single day in all Parma's experience.

Arriving at Flushing, the governor-general was well received by the inhabitants; but the mischief, which had been set a-foot six months before, had done its work. The political intrigues, disputes, and the conflicting party-organizations, have already been set in great detail before the reader, in order that their effect might now be thoroughly understood without—explanation. The governor-general came to Flushing at a most critical moment. The fate of all the Spanish Netherlands, of Sluys, and with it the whole of Philip and Parma's great project, were, in Farnese's own language, hanging by a thread.

It would have been possible—had the transactions of the past six months, so far as regarded Holland and England, been the reverse of what they had been—to save the city; and, by a cordial and united effort, for the two countries to deal the Spanish power such a blow, that summer, as would have paralyzed it for a long time to come, and have placed both commonwealths in comparative security.

Instead of all this, general distrust and mutual jealousy prevailed. Leicester had, previously to his departure from England, summoned the States to meet him at Dort upon his arrival. Not a soul appeared. Such of the state-councillors as were his creatures came to him, and Count Maurice made a visit of ceremony. Discussions about a plan for relieving the siege became mere scenes of bickering and confusion. The officers within Sluys were desirous that a fleet should force its way into the harbour, while, at the same time, the English army, strengthened by the contingent which Leicester had demanded from the States, should advance against the Duke of Parma by land. It was, in truth, the only way to succour the place. The scheme was quite practicable. Leicester recommended it, the Hollanders seemed to favour it, Commandant Groenevelt and Roger Williams urged it.



Page 7

"I do assure you," wrote the honest Welshman to Leicester, "if you will come afore this town, with as many galliots and as many flat-bottomed boats as can cause two men-of-war to enter, they cannot stop their passage, if, your mariners will do a quarter of their duty, as I saw them do divers times. Before, they make their entrance, we will come with our boats, and fight with the greatest part, and show them there is no such great danger. Were it not for my wounded arm, I would be, in your first boat to enter. Notwithstanding, I and other Englishmen will approach their boats in such sort, that we will force them to give their saker of artillery upon us. If, your Excellency will give ear unto those false lewd fellows (the Captain meant the States-General), you shall lose great opportunity. Within ten or twelve days the enemy will make his bridge from Kadzand unto St. Anne, and force you to hazard battle before you succour this town. Let my Lord Willoughby and Sir William Russell land at Terhoven, right against Kadzand, with 4000, and entrench hard by the waterside, where their boats can carry them victual and munition. They may approach by trenches without engaging any dangerous fight We dare not show the estate of this town more than we have done by Captain Herte. We must fight this night within our rampart in the fort. You may sure the world here are no Hamerts, but valiant captains and valiant soldiers, such as, with God's help, had rather be buried in the place than be disgraced in any point that belongs to such a number of men-of-war."

But in vain did the governor of the place, stout Arnold Froenevelt, assisted by the rough and direct eloquence of Roger Williams, urge upon the Earl of Leicester and the States-General the necessity and the practicability of the plan proposed. The fleet never entered the harbour. There was no William of Orange to save Antwerp and Sluys, as Leyden had once been saved, and his son was not old enough to unravel the web of intrigue by which he was surrounded, or to direct the whole energies of the commonwealth towards an all-important end. Leicester had lost all influence, all authority, nor were his military abilities equal to the occasion, even if he had been cordially obeyed.

Ten days longer the perpetual battles on the ramparts and within the mines continued, the plans conveyed by the bold swimmer, Captain Hart, for saving the place were still unattempted, and the city was tottering to its fall. "Had Captain Hart's words taken place," wrote Williams, bitterly, "we had been succoured, or, if my letters had prevailed, our pain had been, no peril: All wars are best executed in sight of the enemy The last night of June (10th July, N. S.) the enemy entered the ditches of our fort in three several places, continuing in fight in mine and on rampart for the space of eight nights. The ninth; he battered us furiously, made a breach of five score paces suitable for horse and man. That day be attempted us in all, places with a general, assault for the space of almost five hours."



Page 8

The citadel was now lost. It had been gallantly defended; and it was thenceforth necessary to hold the town itself, in the very teeth of an overwhelming force. "We were forced to quit the fort," said Sir Roger, "leaving nothing behind us but bare earth. But here we do remain resolutely to be buried, rather than to be dishonoured in the least point."

It was still possible for the fleet to succour the city. "I do assure you," said Williams, "that your captains and mariners do not their duty unless they enter with no great loss; but you must consider that no wars may be made without danger. What you mean to do, we beseech you to do with expedition, and persuade yourself that we will die valiant, honest-men. Your Excellency will do well to thank the old President de Meetkerk for the honesty and valour of his son."

Count Maurice and his natural brother, the Admiral, now undertook the succour by sea; but, according to the Leicestrians, they continued dilatory and incompetent. At any rate, it is certain that they did nothing. At last, Parma had completed the bridge; whose construction, was so much dreaded: The haven was now enclosed by a strong wooden structure, resting on boats, on a plan similar to that of the famous bridge with which he had two years before bridled the Scheldt, and Sluys was thus completely shut in from the sea. Fire-ships were now constructed, by order of Leicester—feeble imitations: of the floating volcanoes of Gianihelli—and it was agreed that they should be sent against the bridge with the first flood-tide. The propitious moment never seemed to arrive, however, and, meantime, the citizens of Flushing, of their own accord, declared that they would themselves equip and conduct a fleet into the harbour of Sluys. But the Nassaus are said to have expressed great disgust that low-born burghers should presume to meddle with so important an enterprise, which of right belonged to their family. Thus, in the midst of these altercations and contradictory schemes; the month of July wore away, and the city was reduced to its last gasp.

For the cannonading had thoroughly done its work. Eighteen days long the burghers and what remained of the garrison had lived upon the ramparts, never leaving their posts, but eating, sleeping, and fighting day and night. Of the sixteen hundred Dutch and English but seven hundred remained. At last a swimming messenger was sent out by the besieged with despatches for the States, to the purport that the city could hold out no longer. A breach in the wall had been effected wide enough to admit a hundred men abreast. Sluys had, in truth, already fallen, and it was hopeless any longer to conceal the fact. If not relieved within a day or two, the garrison would be obliged to surrender; but they distinctly stated, that they had all pledged themselves, soldiers and burghers, men, women, and all, unless the most honourable terms were granted, to set fire to the city in a hundred places, and then sally, in mass, from the gates, determined to fight their way through, or be slain in the attempt. The messenger who carried these despatches was drowned, but the letters were saved, and fell into Parma's hands.

Page 9

At the same moment, Leicester was making, at last, an effort to raise the siege. He brought three or four thousand men from Flushing, and landed them at Ostend; thence he marched to Blanckenburg. He supposed that if he could secure that little port, and thus cut the Duke completely off from the sea, he should force the Spanish commander to raise (or at least suspend) the siege in order to give him battle. Meantime, an opportunity would be afforded for Maurice and Hohenlo to force an entrance into the harbour of Sluys, In this conjecture he was quite correct; but unfortunately he did not thoroughly carry out his own scheme. If the Earl had established himself at Blanckenburg, it would have been necessary for Parma—as he himself subsequently declared—to raise the siege. Leicester carried the outposts of the place successfully; but, so soon as Farnese was aware of this demonstration, he detached a few companies with orders to skirmish with the enemy until the commander-in-chief, with as large a force as he could spare, should come in person to his support. To the unexpected gratification of Farnese, however, no sooner did the advancing Spaniards come in sight, than the Earl, supposing himself invaded by the whole of the Duke's army, under their famous general, and not feeling himself strong enough for such an encounter, retired, with great precipitation, to his boats, re-embarked his troops with the utmost celerity, and set sail for Ostend.

The next night had been fixed for sending forth the fireships against the bridge, and for the entrance of the fleet into the harbour. One fire-ship floated a little way towards the bridge and exploded ingloriously. Leicester rowed in his barge about the fleet, superintending the soundings and markings of the channel, and hastening the preparations; but, as the decisive moment approached, the pilots who had promised to conduct the expedition came aboard his pinnace and positively refused to have aught to do with the enterprise, which they now declared an impossibility. The Earl was furious with the pilots, with Maurice, with Hohenlo, with Admiral de Nassau, with the States, with all the world. He stormed and raged and beat his breast, but all in vain. His ferocity would have been more useful the day before, in face of the Spaniards, than now, against the Zeeland mariners: but the invasion by the fleet alone, unsupported by a successful land-operation, was pronounced impracticable, and very soon a relieving fleet was seen by the distressed garrison sailing away from the neighbourhood, and it soon disappeared beneath the horizon. Their fate was sealed. They entered into treaty with Parma, who, secretly instructed, as has been seen, of their desperate intentions, in case any but the most honourable conditions were offered, granted those conditions. The garrison were allowed to go out with colours displayed, lighted matches, bullet in mouth, and with bag and baggage. Such burghers as chose to conform to the government of Spain and the church of Rome; were permitted to remain. Those who preferred to depart were allowed reasonable time to make their necessary arrangements.



Page 10

“We have hurt and slain very near eight hundred,” said Sir Roger Williams.” We had not powder to fight two hours. There was a breach of almost four hundred paces, another of three score, another of fifty, saltable for horse and men. We had lain continually eighteen nights all on the breaches. He gave us honourable composition. Had the state of England lain on it, our lives could not defend the place, three hours, for half the rampires were his, neither had we any pioneers but ourselves. We were sold by their negligence who are now angry with us.”

On the 5th August Parma entered the city. Roger Williams with his gilt morion rather battered, and his great plume of feathers much bedraggled—was a witness to the victor’s entrance. Alexander saluted respectfully an officer so well known to him by reputation, and with some complimentary remarks urged him to enter the Spanish service, and to take the field against the Turks.

“My sword,” replied the doughty Welshman, “belongs to her royal Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, above and before all the world. When her Highness has no farther use for it, it is at the service of the King of Navarre.” Considering himself sufficiently answered, the Duke then requested Sir Roger to point out Captain Baskerville—very conspicuous by a greater plume of feathers than even that of the Welshman himself—and embraced that officer; when presented to him, before all his staff. “There serves no prince in Europe a braver man than this Englishman,” cried Alexander, who well knew how to appreciate high military qualities, whether in his own army or in that of his foes.

The garrison then retired, Sluy’s became Spanish, and a capacious harbour, just opposite the English coast, was in Parma’s hands. Sir Roger Williams was despatched by Leicester to bear the melancholy tidings to his government, and the Queen was requested to cherish the honest Welshman, and at least to set him on horseback; for he was of himself not rich enough to buy even a saddle. It is painful to say that the captain did not succeed in getting the horse.

The Earl was furious in his invectives against Hohenlo, against Maurice, against the States, uniformly ascribing the loss of Sluy’s to negligence and faction. As for Sir John Norris, he protested that his misdeeds in regard to this business would, in King Henry VIII.’s time, have “cost him his pate.”

The loss of Sluys was the beginning and foreshadowed the inevitable end of Leicester’s second administration. The inaction of the States was one of the causes of its loss. Distrust of Leicester was the cause of the inaction. Sir William Russell, Lord Willoughby, Sir William Pelham, and other English officers, united in statements exonerating the Earl from all blame for the great failure to relieve the place. At the same time, it could hardly be maintained that his expedition to Blanckenburg and his precipitate retreat on the first appearance of the enemy were proofs of consummate generalship. He took no blame to himself for the disaster; but he and his partisans were very liberal in their denunciations of the Hollanders, and Leicester was even ungrateful

enough to censure Roger Williams, whose life had been passed, as it were, at push of pike with the Spaniards, and who was one of his own most devoted adherents.

Page 11

The Queen was much exasperated when informed of the fall of the city. She severely denounced the Netherlanders, and even went so far as to express dissatisfaction with the great Leicester himself. Meantime, Farnese was well satisfied with his triumph, for he had been informed that "all England was about to charge upon him," in order to relieve the place. All England, however, had been but feebly represented by three thousand raw recruits with a paltry sum of £15,000 to help pay a long bill of arrears.

Wilkes and Norris had taken their departure from the Netherlands before the termination of the siege, and immediately after the return of Leicester. They did not think it expedient to wait upon the governor before leaving the country, for they had very good reason to believe that such an opportunity of personal vengeance would be turned to account by the Earl. Wilkes had already avowed his intention of making his escape without being dandled with leave-takings, and no doubt he was right. The Earl was indignant when he found that they had given him the slip, and denounced them with fresh acrimony to the Queen, imploring her to wreak full measure of wrath upon their heads; and he well knew that his entreaties would meet with the royal attention.

Buckhurst had a parting interview with the governor-general, at which Killigrew and Beale, the new English counsellors who had replaced Wilkes and Clerk, were present. The conversation was marked by insolence on the part of Leicester, and by much bitterness on that of Buckhurst. The parting envoy refused to lay before the Earl a full statement of the grievances between the States-General and the governor, on the ground that Leicester had no right to be judge in his own cause. The matter, he said, should be laid before the Queen in council, and by her august decision he was willing to abide. On every other subject he was ready to give any information in his power. The interview lasted a whole forenoon and afternoon. Buckhurst, according to his own statement, answered, freely all questions put to him by Leicester and his counsellors; while, if the report of those personages is to be trusted, he passionately refused to make any satisfactory communication. Under the circumstances, however, it may well be believed that no satisfactory communication was possible.

On arriving in England, Sir John Norris was forbidden to come into her Majesty's presence, Wilkes was thrown into the Fleet Prison, and Buckhurst was confined in his own country house.

Norris had done absolutely nothing, which, even by implication, could be construed into a dereliction of duty; but it was sufficient that he was hated by Leicester, who had not scrupled, over and over again, to denounce this first general of England as a fool, a coward, a knave, and a liar.

Page 12

As for Wilkes, his only crime was a most conscientious discharge of his duty, in the course of which he had found cause to modify his abstract opinions in regard to the origin of sovereignty, and had come reluctantly to the conviction that Leicester's unpopularity had made perhaps another governor-general desirable. But this admission had only been made privately and with extreme caution; while, on the other hand, he had constantly defended the absent Earl, with all the eloquence at his command. But the hatred of Leicester was sufficient to consign this able and painstaking public servant to a prison; and thus was a man of worth, honour, and talent, who had been placed in a position of grave responsibility and immense fatigue, and who had done his duty like an upright, straight-forward Englishman, sacrificed to the wrath of a favourite. "Surely, Mr. Secretary," said the Earl, "there was never a falser creature, a more seditious wretch, than Wilkes. He is a villain, a devil, without faith or religion."

As for Buckhurst himself, it is unnecessary to say a word in his defence. The story of his mission has been completely detailed from the most authentic and secret documents, and there is not a single line written to the Queen, to her ministers, to the States, to any public body or to any private friend, in England or elsewhere, that does not reflect honour on his name. With sagacity, without passion, with unaffected sincerity, he had unravelled the complicated web of Netherland politics, and, with clear vision, had penetrated the designs of the mighty enemy whom England and Holland had to encounter in mortal combat. He had pointed out the errors of the Earl's administration—he had fearlessly, earnestly, but respectfully deplored the misplaced parsimony of the Queen—he had warned her against the delusions which had taken possession of her keen intellect—he had done—his best to place the governor-general upon good terms with the States and with his sovereign; but it had been impossible for him to further his schemes for the acquisition of a virtual sovereignty over the Netherlands, or to extinguish the suspicions of the States that the Queen was secretly negotiating with the Spaniard, when he knew those suspicions to be just.

For deeds, such as these, the able and high-minded ambassador, the accomplished statesman and poet, was forbidden to approach his sovereign's presence, and was ignominiously imprisoned in his own house until the death of Leicester. After that event, Buckhurst emerged from confinement, received the order of the garter and the Earldom of Dorset, and on the death of Burghley succeeded that statesman in the office of Lord-Treasurer. Such was the substantial recognition of the merits of a man who was now disgraced for the conscientious discharge of the most important functions that had yet been confided to him.

It would be a thankless and superfluous task to give the details of the renewed attempt, during a few months, made by Leicester to govern the Provinces. His second administration consisted mainly of the same altercations with the States, on the subject of sovereignty, the same mutual recriminations and wranglings, that had characterized the period of his former rule. He rarely met the States in person, and almost never

resided at the Hague, holding his court at Middleburg, Dort, or Utrecht, as his humour led him.



Page 13

The one great feature of the autumn of 1587 was the private negotiation between Elizabeth and the Duke of Parma.

Before taking a glance at the nature of those secrets, however, it is necessary to make a passing allusion to an event which might have seemed likely to render all pacific communications with Spain, whether secret or open, superfluous.

For while so much time had been lost in England and Holland, by misunderstandings and jealousies, there was one Englishman who had not been losing time. In the winter and early spring of 1587, the Devonshire skipper had organized that expedition which he had come to the Netherlands, the preceding autumn, to discuss. He meant to aim a blow at the very heart of that project which Philip was shrouding with so much mystery, and which Elizabeth was attempting to counteract by so much diplomacy.

On the 2nd April, Francis Drake sailed from Plymouth with four ships belonging to the Queen, and with twenty-four furnished by the merchants of London, and other private individuals. It was a bold buccaneering expedition—combining chivalrous enterprise with the chance of enormous profit—which was most suited to the character of English adventurers at that expanding epoch. For it was by England, not by Elizabeth, that the quarrel with Spain was felt to be a mortal one. It was England, not its sovereign, that was instinctively arming, at all points, to grapple with the great enemy of European liberty. It was the spirit of self-help, of self-reliance, which was prompting the English nation to take the great work of the age into its own hands. The mercantile instinct of the nation was flattered with the prospect of gain, the martial quality of its patrician and of its plebeian blood was eager to confront danger, the great Protestant mutiny. Against a decrepit superstition in combination with an aggressive tyranny, all impelled the best energies of the English people against Spain, as the embodiment of all which was odious and menacing to them, and with which they felt that the life and death struggle could not long be deferred.

And of these various tendencies, there were no more fitting representatives than Drake and Frobisher, Hawkins and Essex, Cavendish and Grenfell, and the other privateersmen of the sixteenth century. The same greed for danger, for gold, and for power, which, seven centuries before, had sent the Norman race forth to conquer all Christendom, was now sending its Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman kindred to take possession of the old world and the new.

“The wind commands me away,” said Drake on the 2nd April, 1587; “our ship is under sail. God grant that we may so live in His fear, that the enemy may have cause to say that God doth fight for her Majesty abroad as well as at home.”

Page 14

But he felt that he was not without enemies behind him, for the strong influence brought to bear against the bold policy which Walsingham favoured, was no secret to Drake. "If we deserve ill," said he, "let us be punished. If we discharge our duty, in doing our best, it is a hard measure to be reported ill by those who will either keep their fingers out of the fire; or who too well affect that alteration in our government which I hope in God they shall never live to see." In latitude 40 deg. he spoke two Zeeland ships, homeward bound, and obtained information of great warlike stores accumulating in Cadiz and Lisbon. His mind was instantly made up. Fortunately, the pinnace which the Queen despatched with orders to stay his hand in the very act of smiting her great adversary, did not sail fast enough to overtake the swift corsair and his fleet. Sir Francis had too promptly obeyed the wind, when it "commanded him away," to receive the royal countermand. On the 19th April, the English ships entered the harbour of Cadiz, and destroyed ten thousand tons of shipping, with their contents, in the very face of a dozen great galleys, which the nimble English vessels soon drove under their forts for shelter. Two nights and a day, Sir Francis, that "hater of idleness," was steadily doing his work; unloading, rifling, scuttling, sinking, and burning those transportships which contained a portion of the preparations painfully made by Philip for his great enterprise. Pipe-staves and spikes, horse-shoes and saddles, timber and cutlasses, wine, oil, figs, raisins, biscuits, and flour, a miscellaneous mass of ingredients long brewing for the trouble of England, were emptied into the harbour, and before the second night, the blaze of a hundred and fifty burning vessels played merrily upon the grim walls of Philip's fortresses. Some of these ships were of the largest size then known. There was one belonging to Marquis Santa Cruz of 1500 tons, there was a Biscayan of 1200, there were several others of 1000, 800, and of nearly equal dimensions.

Thence sailing for Lisbon, Sir Francis, captured and destroyed a hundred vessels more, appropriating what was portable of the cargoes, and annihilating the rest. At Lisbon, Marquis Santa Cruz, lord high admiral of Spain and generalissimo of the invasion, looked on, mortified and amazed, but offering no combat, while the Plymouth privateersman swept the harbour of the great monarch of the world. After thoroughly accomplishing his work, Drake sent a message to Santa Cruz, proposing to exchange his prisoners for such Englishmen as might then be confined in Spain. But the marquis denied all prisoners. Thereupon Sir Francis decided to sell his captives to the Moors, and to appropriate the proceeds of the sale towards the purchase of English slaves put of the same bondage. Such was the fortune of war in the sixteenth century.



Page 15

Having dealt these great blows, Drake set sail again from Lisbon, and, twenty leagues from St. Michaels, fell in with one of those famous Spanish East Indiamen, called carracks, then the great wonder of the seas. This vessel, San Felipe by name, with a cargo of extraordinary value, was easily captured, and Sir Francis now determined to return. He had done a good piece of work in a few weeks, but he was by no means of opinion that he had materially crippled the enemy. On the contrary, he gave the government warning as to the enormous power and vast preparations of Spain. "There would be forty thousand men under way ere long," he said, "well equipped and provisioned; "and he stated, as the result of personal observation, that England could not be too energetic in, its measures of resistance. He had done something with his little fleet, but he was no braggart, and had no disposition to underrate the enemy's power. "God make us all thankful again and again," he observed, "that we have, although it be little, made a beginning upon the coast of Spain." And modestly as he spoke of what he had accomplished, so with quiet self-reliance did he allude to the probable consequences. It was certain, he intimated, that the enemy would soon seek revenge with all his strength, and "with all the devices and traps he could devise." This was a matter which could not be doubted. "But," said Sir Francis, "I thank them much that they have staid so long, and when they come they shall be but the sons of mortal men."

Perhaps the most precious result of the expedition, was the lesson which the Englishmen had thus learned in handling the great galleys of Spain. It might soon stand them in stead. The little war-vessels which had come from Plymouth, had sailed round and round these vast unwieldy hulks, and had fairly driven them off the field, with very slight damage to themselves. Sir Francis had already taught the mariners of England, even if he had done nothing else by this famous Cadiz expedition, that an armada, of Spain might not be so invincible as men imagined.

Yet when the conqueror returned from his great foray, he received no laurels. His sovereign met him, not with smiles, but with frowns and cold rebukes. He had done his duty, and helped to save her endangered throne, but Elizabeth was now the dear friend of Alexander Farnese, and in amicable correspondence with his royal master. This "little" beginning on the coast of Spain might not seem to his Catholic Majesty a matter to be thankful for, nor be likely to further a pacification, and so Elizabeth hastened to disavow her Plymouth captain.'

Page 16

[“True it is, and I avow it on my faith, her Majesty did send a ship expressly before he went to Cadiz with a message by letters charging Sir Francis Drake not to show any act of hostility, which messenger by contrary winds could never come to the place where he was, but was constrained to come home, and hearing of Sir F. Drake’s actions, her Majesty commanded the party that returned to have been punished, but that he acquitted himself by the oaths of himself and all his company. And so unwitting yea unwilling to her Majesty those actions were committed by Sir F. Drake, for the which her Majesty is as yet greatly offended with him.” Burghley to Andreas de Loo, 18 July, 1587. Flanders Correspondence.’ (S. P. Office Ms.)]

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The blaze of a hundred and fifty burning vessels
We were sold by their negligence who are now angry with us

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