

History of the United Netherlands, 1588c eBook

History of the United Netherlands, 1588c 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. 57

History of the United Netherlands, 1588

CHAPTER XIX. Part 1.

Philip Second in his Cabinet—His System of Work and Deception—His vast but vague Schemes of Conquest—The Armada sails—Description of the Fleet—The Junction with Parma unprovided for—The Gale off Finisterre—Exploits of David Gwynn—First Engagements in the English Channel—Considerable Losses of the Spaniards—General Engagement near Portland—Superior Seamanship of the English

It is now time to look in upon the elderly letter-writer in the Escorial, and see how he was playing his part in the drama.

His counsellors were very few. His chief advisers were rather like private secretaries than cabinet ministers; for Philip had been withdrawing more and more into seclusion and mystery as the webwork of his schemes multiplied and widened. He liked to do his work, assisted by a very few confidential servants. The Prince of Eboli, the famous Ruy Gomez, was dead. So was Cardinal Granvelle. So were Erasso and Delgado. His midnight council—*junta de noche*—for thus, from its original hour of assembling, and the all of secrecy in which it was enwrapped, it was habitually called—was a triumvirate. Don Juan de Idiaquez was chief secretary of state and of war; the Count de Chinchon was minister for the household, for Italian affairs, and for the kingdom of Aragon; Don Cristoval de Moura, the monarch's chief favourite, was at the head of the finance department, and administered the affairs of Portugal and Castile!

The president of the council of Italy, after Granvelle's death, was Quiroga, cardinal of Toledo, and inquisitor-general. Enormously long letters, in the King's name, were prepared chiefly by the two secretaries, Idiaquez and Moura. In their hands was the vast correspondence with Mendoza and Parma, and Olivarez at Rome, and with Mucio; in which all the stratagems for the subjugation of Protestant Europe were slowly and artistically contrived. Of the great conspiracy against human liberty, of which the Pope and Philip were the double head, this midnight triumvirate was the chief executive committee.

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These innumerable despatches, signed by Philip, were not the emanations of his own mind. The King had a fixed purpose to subdue Protestantism and to conquer the world; but the plans for carrying the purpose into effect were developed by subtler and more comprehensive minds than his own. It was enough for him to ponder wearily over schemes which he was supposed to dictate, and to give himself the appearance of supervising what he scarcely comprehended. And his work of supervision was often confined to pettiest details. The handwriting of Spain and Italy at that day was beautiful, and in our modern eyes seems neither antiquated nor ungraceful. But Philip's scrawl was like that of 'a' clown just admitted to a writing-school, and the whole margin of a fairly penned despatch perhaps fifty pages long; laid before him for comment and signature by Idiaquez or Moura, would be sometimes covered with a few awkward sentences, which it was almost impossible to read, and which, when deciphered, were apt to reveal suggestions of astounding triviality.

Thus a most important despatch—in which the King, with his own hand, was supposed to be conveying secret intelligence to Mendoza concerning the Armada, together with minute directions for the regulation of Guise's conduct at the memorable epoch of the barricades—contained but a single comment from the monarch's own pen. "The Armada has been in Lisbon about a month—quassi un mes"—wrote the secretary. "There is but one s in quasi," said Philip.

Again, a despatch of Mendoza to the King contained the intelligence that Queen Elizabeth was, at the date of the letter, residing at St. James's. Philip, who had no objection to display his knowledge of English affairs—as became the man who had already been almost sovereign of England, and meant to be entirely so—supplied a piece of information in an apostille to this despatch. "St. James is a house of recreation," he said, "which was once a monastery. There is a park between it, and the palace which is called Huytal; but why it is called Huytal, I am sure I don't know." His researches in the English language had not enabled him to recognize the adjective and substantive out of which the abstruse compound White-Hall (Huyt-al), was formed.

On another occasion, a letter from England containing important intelligence concerning the number of soldiers enrolled in that country to resist the Spanish invasion, the quantity of gunpowder and various munitions collected, with other details of like nature, furnished besides a bit of information of less vital interest. "In the windows of the Queen's presence-chamber they have discovered a great quantity of lice, all clustered together," said the writer.

Such a minute piece of statistics could not escape the microscopic eye of Philip. So, disregarding the soldiers and the gunpowder, he commented only on this last-mentioned clause of the letter; and he did it cautiously too, as a King surnamed the Prudent should:—

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“But perhaps they were fleas,” wrote Philip.

Such examples—and many more might be given—sufficiently indicate the nature of the man on whom such enormous responsibilities rested, and who had been, by the adulation of his fellow-creatures, elevated into a god. And we may cast a glance upon him as he sits in his cabinet—buried among those piles of despatches—and receiving methodically, at stated hours, Idiaquez, or Moura, or Chincon, to settle the affairs of so many millions of the human race; and we may watch exactly the progress of that scheme, concerning which so many contradictory rumours were circulating in Europe. In the month of April a Walsingham could doubt, even in August an ingenuous comptroller could disbelieve, the reality of the great project, and the Pope himself, even while pledging himself to assistance, had been systematically deceived. He had supposed the whole scheme rendered futile by the exploit of Drake at Cadiz, and had declared that “the Queen of England’s distaff was worth more than Philip’s sword, that the King was a poor creature, that he would never be able to come to a resolution, and that even if he should do so, it would be too late;” and he had subsequently been doing his best, through his nuncio in France, to persuade the Queen to embrace the Catholic religion, and thus save herself from the impending danger. Henry III. had even been urged by the Pope to send a special ambassador to her for this purpose—as if the persuasions of the wretched Valois were likely to be effective with Elizabeth Tudor—and Burghley had, by means of spies in Rome, who pretended to be Catholics, given out intimations that the Queen was seriously contemplating such a step. Thus the Pope, notwithstanding Cardinal Allan, the famous million, and the bull, was thought by Mendoza to be growing lukewarm in the Spanish cause, and to be urging upon the “Englishwoman” the propriety of converting herself, even at the late hour of May, 1588.

But Philip, for years, had been maturing his scheme, while reposing entire confidence—beyond his own cabinet doors—upon none but Alexander Farnese; and the Duke—alone of all men—was perfectly certain that the invasion would, this year, be attempted.

The captain-general of the expedition was the Marquis of Santa Cruz, a man of considerable naval experience, and of constant good fortune, who, in thirty years, had never sustained a defeat. He had however shown no desire to risk one when Drake had offered him the memorable challenge in the year 1587, and perhaps his reputation of the invincible captain had been obtained by the same adroitness on previous occasions. He was no friend to Alexander Farnese, and was much disgusted when informed of the share allotted to the Duke in the great undertaking. A course of reproach and perpetual reprimand was the treatment to which he was, in consequence, subjected, which was not more conducive to the advancement of the expedition than

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it was to the health of the captain-general. Early in January the Cardinal Archduke was sent to Lisbon to lecture him, with instructions to turn a deaf ear to all his remonstrances, to deal with him peremptorily, to forbid his writing letters on the subject to his Majesty, and to order him to accept his post or to decline it without conditions, in which latter contingency he was to be informed that his successor was already decided upon.

This was not the most eligible way perhaps for bringing the captain-general into a cheerful mood; particularly as he was expected to be ready in January to sail to the Flemish coast. Nevertheless the Marquis expressed a hope to accomplish his sovereign's wishes; and great had been the bustle in all the dockyards of Naples, Sicily, and Spain; particularly in the provinces of Guipuzcoa, Biscay, and Andalusia, and in the four great cities of the coast. War-ships of all dimensions, tenders, transports, soldiers, sailors, sutlers, munitions of war, provisions, were all rapidly concentrating in Lisbon as the great place of rendezvous; and Philip confidently believed, and as confidently informed the Duke of Parma, that he, might be expecting the Armada at any time after the end of January.

Perhaps in the history of mankind there has never been a vast project of conquest conceived and matured in so protracted and yet so desultory a manner, as was this famous Spanish invasion. There was something almost puerile in the whims rather than schemes of Philip for carrying out his purpose. It was probable that some resistance would be offered, at least by the navy of England, to the subjugation of that country, and the King had enjoyed an opportunity, the preceding summer, of seeing the way in which English sailors did their work. He had also appeared to understand the necessity of covering the passage of Farnese from the Flemish ports into the Thames, by means of the great Spanish fleet from Lisbon. Nevertheless he never seemed to be aware that Farnese could not invade England quite by himself, and was perpetually expecting to hear that he had done so.

"Holland and Zeeland," wrote Alexander to Philip, "have been arming with their accustomed promptness; England has made great preparations. I have done my best to make the impossible possible; but your letter told me to wait for Santa Cruz, and to expect him very shortly. If, on the contrary, you had told me to make the passage without him, I would have made the attempt, although we had every one of us perished. Four ships of war could sink every one of my boats. Nevertheless I beg to be informed of your Majesty's final order. If I am seriously expected to make the passage without Santa Cruz, I am ready to do it, although I should go all alone in a cock-boat."

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But Santa Cruz at least was not destined to assist in the conquest of England; for, worn out with fatigue and vexation, goaded by the reproaches and insults of Philip, Santa Cruz was dead. He was replaced in the chief command of the fleet by the Duke of Medina Sidonia, a grandee of vast wealth, but with little capacity and less experience. To the iron marquis it was said that a golden duke had succeeded; but the duke of gold did not find it easier to accomplish impossibilities than his predecessor had done. Day after day, throughout the months of winter and spring, the King had been writing that the fleet was just on the point of sailing, and as frequently he had been renewing to Alexander Farnese the intimation that perhaps, after all, he might find an opportunity of crossing to England, without waiting for its arrival. And Alexander, with the same regularity, had been informing his master that the troops in the Netherlands had been daily dwindling from sickness and other causes, till at last, instead of the 30,000 effective infantry, with which it had been originally intended to make the enterprise, he had not more than 17,000 in the month of April. The 6000 Spaniards, whom he was to receive from the fleet of Medina Sidonia, would therefore be the very mainspring of his army. After leaving no more soldiers in the Netherlands than were absolutely necessary for the defence of the obedient Provinces against the rebels, he could only take with him to England 23,000 men, even after the reinforcements from Medina. "When we talked of taking England by surprise," said Alexander, "we never thought of less than 30,000. Now that she is alert and ready for us, and that it is certain we must fight by sea and by land, 50,000 would be few." He almost ridiculed the King's suggestion that a feint might be made by way of besieging some few places in Holland or Zeeland. The whole matter in hand, he said, had become as public as possible, and the only efficient blind was the peace-negotiation; for many believed, as the English deputies were now treating at Ostend, that peace would follow.

At last, on the 28th, 29th, and 30th May, 1588, the fleet, which had been waiting at Lisbon more than a month for favourable weather, set sail from that port, after having been duly blessed by the Cardinal Archduke Albert, viceroy of Portugal.

There were rather more than one hundred and thirty ships in all, divided into ten squadrons. There was the squadron of Portugal, consisting of ten galleons, and commanded by the captain-general, Medina Sidonia. In the squadron of Castile were fourteen ships of various sizes, under General Diego Flores de Valdez. This officer was one of the most experienced naval officers in the Spanish service, and was subsequently ordered, in consequence, to sail with the generalissimo in his flag-ship. In the squadron of Andalusia were ten galleons and other vessels, under General Pedro de Valdez. In the squadron of Biscay were

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ten galleons and lesser ships, under General Juan Martinet de Recalde, upper admiral of the fleet. In the squadron of Guipuzcoa were ten galleons, under General Miguel de Oquendo. In the squadron of Italy were ten ships, under General Martin de Bertendona. In the squadron of Urcas, or store-ships, were twenty-three sail, under General Juan Gomez de Medina. The squadron of tenders, caravels, and other vessels, numbered twenty-two sail, under General Antonio Hurtado de Mendoza. The squadron of four galeasses was commanded by Don Hugo de Moncada. The squadron of four galeras, or galleys, was in charge of Captain Diego de Medrado.

Next in command to Medina Sidonia was Don Alonzo de Leyva, captain-general of the light horse of Milan. Don Francisco de Bobadilla was marshal-general of the camp. Don Diego de Pimentel was marshal of the camp to the famous Terzio or legion of Sicily.

The total tonnage of the fleet was 59,120: the number of guns was 3165. Of Spanish troops there were 19,295 on board: there were 8252 sailors and 2088 galley-slaves. Besides these, there was a force of noble volunteers, belonging to the most illustrious houses of Spain, with their attendants amounting to nearly 2000 in all. There was also Don Martin Alaccon, administrator and vicar-general of the Holy Inquisition, at the head of some 290 monks of the mendicant orders, priests and familiars. The grand total of those embarked was about 30,000. The daily expense of the fleet was estimated by Don Diego de Pimentel at 12,000 ducats a-day, and the daily cost of the combined naval and military force under Farnese and Medina Sidonia was stated at 30,000 ducats.

The size of the ships ranged from 1200 tons to 300. The galleons, of which there were about sixty, were huge round-stemmed clumsy vessels, with bulwarks three or four feet thick, and built up at stem and stern, like castles. The galeasses of which there were four—were a third larger than the ordinary galley, and were rowed each by three hundred galley-slaves. They consisted of an enormous towering fortress at the stern; a castellated structure almost equally massive in front, with seats for the rowers amidships. At stem and stern and between each of the slaves' benches were heavy cannon. These galeasses were floating edifices, very wonderful to contemplate. They were gorgeously decorated. There were splendid state-apartments, cabins, chapels, and pulpits in each, and they were amply provided with awnings, cushions, streamers, standards, gilded saints, and bands of music. To take part in an ostentatious pageant, nothing could be better devised. To fulfil the great objects of a war-vessel—to sail and to fight—they were the worst machines ever launched upon the ocean. The four galleys were similar to the galeasses in every respect except that of size, in which they were by one-third inferior.

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All the ships of the fleet—galeasses, galleys, galleons, and hulks—were so encumbered with top-hamper, so overweighted in proportion to their draught of water, that they could bear but little canvas, even with smooth seas and light and favourable winds. In violent tempests, therefore, they seemed likely to suffer. To the eyes of the 16th century these vessels seemed enormous. A ship of 1300 tons was then a monster rarely seen, and a fleet, numbering from 130 to 150 sail, with an aggregate tonnage of 60,000, seemed sufficient to conquer the world, and to justify the arrogant title, by which it had baptized itself, of the Invincible.

Such was the machinery which Philip had at last set afloat, for the purpose of dethroning Elizabeth and establishing the inquisition in England. One hundred and forty ships, eleven thousand Spanish veterans, as many more recruits, partly Spanish, partly Portuguese, 2000 grandees, as many galley-slaves, and three hundred barefooted friars and inquisitors.

The plan was simple. Medina Sidonia was to proceed straight from Lisbon to Calais roads: there he was to wait: for the Duke of Parma, who was to come forth from Newport, Sluys, and Dunker, bringing with him his 17,000 veterans, and to assume the chief command of the whole expedition. They were then to cross the channel to Dover, land the army of Parma, reinforced with 6000 Spaniards from the fleet, and with these 23,000 men Alexander was to march at once upon London. Medina Sidonia was to seize and fortify the Isle of Wight, guard the entrance of the harbours against any interference from the Dutch and English fleets, and—so soon as the conquest of England had been effected—he was to proceed to Ireland. It had been the wish of Sir William Stanley that Ireland should be subjugated first, as a basis of operations against England; but this had been overruled. The intrigues of Mendoza and Farnese, too, with the Catholic nobles of Scotland, had proved, after all, unsuccessful. King James had yielded to superior offers of money and advancement held out to him by Elizabeth, and was now, in Alexander's words, a confirmed heretic.

There was no course left, therefore, but to conquer England at once. A strange omission had however been made in the plan from first to last. The commander of the whole expedition was the Duke of Parma: on his head was the whole responsibility. Not a gun was to be fired—if it could be avoided—until he had come forth with his veterans to make his junction with the Invincible Armada off Calais. Yet there was no arrangement whatever to enable him to come forth—not the slightest provision to effect that junction. It would almost seem that the letter-writer of the Escorial had been quite ignorant of the existence of the Dutch fleets off Dunker, Newport, and Flushing, although he had certainly received information enough of this formidable obstacle to his plan.

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"Most joyful I shall be," said Farnese—writing on one of the days when he had seemed most convinced by Valentine Dale's arguments, and driven to despair by his postulates—"to see myself with these soldiers on English ground, where, with God's help, I hope to accomplish your Majesty's demands." He was much troubled however to find doubts entertained at the last moment as to his 6000 Spaniards; and certainly it hardly needed an argument to prove that the invasion of England with but 17,000 soldiers was a somewhat hazardous scheme. Yet the pilot Moresini had brought him letters from Medina Sidonia, in which the Duke expressed hesitation about parting with these 6000 veterans; unless the English fleet should have been previously destroyed, and had also again expressed his hope that Parma would be punctual to the rendezvous. Alexander immediately combated these views in letters to Medina and to the King. He avowed that he would not depart one tittle from the plan originally laid down. The 6000 men, and more if possible, were to be furnished him, and the Spanish Armada was to protect his own flotilla, and to keep the channel clear of enemies. No other scheme was possible, he said, for it was clear that his collection of small flat-bottomed river-boats and hoys could not even make the passage, except in smooth weather. They could not contend with a storm, much less with the enemy's ships, which would destroy them utterly in case of a meeting, without his being able to avail himself of his soldiers—who would be so closely packed as to be hardly moveable—or of any human help. The preposterous notion that he should come out with his flotilla to make a junction with Medina off Calais, was over and over again denounced by Alexander with vehemence and bitterness, and most boding expressions were used by him as to the probable result, were such a delusion persisted in.

Every possible precaution therefore but one had been taken. The King of France—almost at the same instant in which Guise had been receiving his latest instructions from the Escorial for dethroning and destroying that monarch—had been assured by Philip of his inalienable affection; had been informed of the object of this great naval expedition—which was not by any means, as Mendoza had stated to Henry, an enterprise against France or England, but only a determined attempt to clear the sea, once for all, of these English pirates who had done so much damage for years past on the high seas—and had been requested, in case any Spanish ship should be driven by stress of weather into French ports, to afford them that comfort and protection to which the vessels of so close and friendly an ally were entitled.

Thus there was bread, beef, and powder enough—there were monks and priests enough—standards, galley-slaves, and inquisitors enough; but there were no light vessels in the Armada, and no heavy vessels in Parma's fleet. Medina could not go to Farnese, nor could Farnese come to Medina. The junction was likely to be difficult, and yet it had never once entered the heads of Philip or his counsellors to provide for that difficulty. The King never seemed to imagine that Farnese, with 40,000 or 50,000 soldiers in the Netherlands, a fleet of 300 transports, and power to dispose of very large funds for one great purpose, could be kept in prison by a fleet of Dutch skippers and corsairs.

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With as much sluggishness as might have been expected from their clumsy architecture, the ships of the Armada consumed nearly three weeks in sailing from Lisbon to the neighbourhood of Cape Finisterre. Here they were overtaken by a tempest, and were scattered hither and thither, almost at the mercy of the winds and waves; for those unwieldy hulks were ill adapted to a tempest in the Bay of Biscay. There were those in the Armada, however, to whom the storm was a blessing. David Gwynn, a Welsh mariner, had sat in the Spanish hulks a wretched galley-slave—as prisoner of war for more than eleven years, hoping, year after year, for a chance of escape from bondage. He sat now among the rowers of the great galley, the *Trasana*, one of the humblest instruments by which the subjugation of his native land to Spain and Rome was to be effected.

Very naturally, among the ships which suffered most in the gale were the four huge unwieldy galleys—a squadron of four under Don Diego de Medrado—with their enormous turrets at stem and stern, and their low and open waists. The chapels, pulpits, and gilded Madonnas proved of little avail in a hurricane. The *Diana*, largest of the four, went down with all hands; the *Princess* was labouring severely in the trough of the sea, and the *Trasana* was likewise in imminent danger. So the master of this galley asked the Welsh slave, who had far more experience and seamanship than he possessed himself, if it were possible to save the vessel. Gwynn saw an opportunity for which he had been waiting eleven years. He was ready to improve it. He pointed out to the captain the hopelessness of attempting to overtake the Armada. They should go down, he said, as the *Diana* had already done, and as the *Princess* was like at any moment to do, unless they took in every rag of sail, and did their best with their oars to gain the nearest port. But in order that the rowers might exert themselves to the utmost, it was necessary that the soldiers, who were a useless incumbrance on deck, should go below. Thus only could the ship be properly handled. The captain, anxious to save his ship and his life, consented. Most of the soldiers were sent beneath the hatches: a few were ordered to sit on the benches among the slaves. Now there had been a secret understanding for many days among these unfortunate men, nor were they wholly without weapons. They had been accustomed to make toothpicks and other trifling articles for sale out of broken sword-blades and other refuse bits of steel. There was not a man among them who had not thus provided himself with a secret stiletto.

At first Gwynn occupied himself with arrangements for weathering the gale. So soon however as the ship had been made comparatively easy, he looked around him, suddenly threw down his cap, and raised his hand to the rigging. It was a preconcerted signal. The next instant he stabbed the captain to the heart, while each one of the galley-slaves killed the soldier nearest him; then, rushing below, they surprised and overpowered the rest of the troops, and put them all to death.

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Coming again upon deck, David Gwynn descried the fourth galley of the squadron, called the Royal, commanded by Commodore Medrado in person, bearing down upon them, before the wind. It was obvious that the Vasana was already an object of suspicion.

“Comrades,” said Gwynn, “God has given us liberty, and by our courage we must prove ourselves worthy of the boon.”

As he spoke there came a broadside from the galley Royal which killed nine of his crew. David, nothing daunted; laid his ship close alongside of the Royal, with such a shock that the timbers quivered again. Then at the head of his liberated slaves, now thoroughly armed, he dashed on board the galley, and, after a furious conflict, in which he was assisted by the slaves of the Royal, succeeded in mastering the vessel, and putting all the Spanish soldiers to death. This done, the combined rowers, welcoming Gwynn as their deliverer from an abject slavery which seemed their lot for life, willingly accepted his orders. The gale had meantime abated, and the two galleys, well conducted by the experienced and intrepid Welshman, made their way to the coast of France, and landed at Bayonne on the 31st, dividing among them the property found on board the two galleys. Thence, by land, the fugitives, four hundred and sixty-six in number—Frenchmen, Spaniards, Englishmen, Turks, and Moors, made their way to Rochelle. Gwynn had an interview with Henry of Navarre, and received from that chivalrous king a handsome present. Afterwards he found his way to England, and was well commended by the Queen. The rest of the liberated slaves dispersed in various directions.

This was the first adventure of the invincible Armada. Of the squadron of galleys, one was already sunk in the sea, and two of the others had been conquered by their own slaves. The fourth rode out the gale with difficulty, and joined the rest of the fleet, which ultimately re-assembled at Coruna; the ships having, in distress, put in at first at Vivera, Ribadeo, Gijon, and other northern ports of Spain. At the Groyne—as the English of that day were accustomed to call Coruna—they remained a month, repairing damages and recruiting; and on the 22nd of July 3 (N.S.) the Armada set sail: Six days later, the Spaniards took soundings, thirty leagues from the Scilly Islands, and on—Friday, the 29th of July, off the Lizard, they had the first glimpse of the land of promise presented them by Sixtus V., of which they had at last come to take possession.

[The dates in the narrative will be always given according to the New Style, then already adopted by Spain, Holland, and France, although not by England. The dates thus given are, of course, ten days later than they appear in contemporary English records.]

On the same day and night the blaze and smoke of ten thousand beacon-fires from the Land's End to Margate, and from the Isle of Wight to Cumberland, gave warning to every Englishman that the enemy was at last upon them. Almost at that very instant intelligence had been brought from the court to the Lord-Admiral at Plymouth, that the

Armada, dispersed and shattered by the gales of June, was not likely to make its appearance that year; and orders had consequently been given to disarm the four largest ships, and send them into dock. Even Walsingham, as already stated, had participated in this strange delusion.

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Before Howard had time to act upon this ill-timed suggestion—even had he been disposed to do so—he received authentic intelligence that the great fleet was off the Lizard. Neither he nor Francis Drake were the men to lose time in such an emergency, and before that Friday, night was spent, sixty of the best English ships had been warped out of Plymouth harbour.

On Saturday, 30th July, the wind was very light at southwest, with a mist and drizzling rain, but by three in the afternoon the two fleets could descry and count each other through the haze.

By nine o'clock, 31st July, about two miles from Looe, on the Cornish coast, the fleets had their first meeting. There were 136 sail of the Spaniards, of which ninety were large ships, and sixty-seven of the English. It was a solemn moment. The long-expected Armada presented a pompous, almost a theatrical appearance. The ships seemed arranged for a pageant, in honour of a victory already won. Disposed in form of a crescent, the horns of which were seven miles asunder, those gilded, towered, floating castles, with their gaudy standards and their martial music, moved slowly along the channel, with an air of indolent pomp. Their captain-general, the golden Duke, stood in his private shot-proof fortress, on the—deck of his great galleon the Saint Martin, surrounded by generals of infantry, and colonels of cavalry, who knew as little as he did himself of naval matters. The English vessels, on the other hand—with a few exceptions, light, swift, and easily handled—could sail round and round those unwieldy galleons, hulks, and galleys rowed by fettered slave-gangs. The superior seamanship of free Englishmen, commanded by such experienced captains as Drake, Frobisher, and Hawkins— from infancy at home on blue water—was manifest in the very, first encounter. They obtained the weather-gage at once, and cannonaded the enemy at intervals with considerable effect, easily escaping at will out of range of the sluggish Armada, which was incapable of bearing sail in pursuit, although provided with an armament which could sink all its enemies at close quarters. “We had some small fight with them that Sunday afternoon,” said Hawkins.

Medina Sidonia hoisted the royal standard at the fore, and the whole fleet did its utmost, which was little, to offer general battle. It was in vain. The English, following at the heels of the enemy, refused all such invitations, and attacked only the rear-guard of the Armada, where Recalde commanded. That admiral, steadily maintaining his post, faced his nimble antagonists, who continued to tease, to maltreat, and to elude him, while the rest of the fleet proceeded slowly up the Channel closely, followed by the enemy. And thus the running fight continued along the coast, in full view of Plymouth, whence boats with reinforcements and volunteers were perpetually arriving to the English ships, until the battle had drifted quite out of reach of the town.

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Already in this first “small fight” the Spaniards had learned a lesson, and might even entertain a doubt of their invincibility. But before the sun set there were more serious disasters. Much powder and shot had been expended by the Spaniards to very little purpose, and so a master-gunner on board Admiral Oquendo’s flag-ship was reprimanded for careless ball-practice. The gunner, who was a Fleming, enraged with his captain, laid a train to the powder-magazine, fired it, and threw himself into the sea. Two decks blew up. The into the clouds, carrying with it the paymaster-general of the fleet, a large portion of treasure, and nearly two hundred men.’ The ship was a wreck, but it was possible to save the rest of the crew. So Medina Sidonia sent light vessels to remove them, and wore with his flag-ship, to defend Oquendo, who had already been fastened upon by his English pursuers. But the Spaniards, not being so light in hand as their enemies, involved themselves in much embarrassment by this manoeuvre; and there was much falling foul of each other, entanglement of rigging, and carrying away of yards. Oquendo’s men, however, were ultimately saved, and taken to other ships.

Meantime Don Pedro de Valdez, commander of the Andalusian squadron, having got his galleon into collision with two or three Spanish ships successively, had at last carried away his fore-mast close to the deck, and the wreck had fallen against his main-mast. He lay crippled and helpless, the Armada was slowly deserting him, night was coming on, the sea was running high, and the English, ever hovering near, were ready to grapple with him. In vain did Don Pedro fire signals of distress. The captain-general, even as though the unlucky galleon had not been connected with the Catholic fleet—calmly fired a gun to collect his scattered ships, and abandoned Valdez to his fate. “He left me comfortless in sight of the whole fleet,” said poor Pedro, “and greater inhumanity and unthankfulness I think was never heard of among men.”

Yet the Spaniard comported himself most gallantly. Frobisher, in the largest ship of the English fleet, the *Triumph*, of 1100 tons, and Hawkins in the *Victory*, of 800, cannonaded him at a distance, but, night coming on, he was able to resist; and it was not till the following morning that he surrendered to the *Revenge*.

Drake then received the gallant prisoner on board his flagship—much to the disgust and indignation of Frobisher and Hawkins, thus disappointed of their prize and ransom-money—treated him with much courtesy, and gave his word of honour that he and his men should be treated fairly like good prisoners of war. This pledge was redeemed, for it was not the English, as it was the Spanish custom, to convert captives into slaves, but only to hold them for ransom. Valdez responded to Drake’s politeness by kissing his hand, embracing him, and overpowering him with magnificent compliments. He was then sent on board the *Lord-Admiral*, who received him with similar urbanity, and expressed his regret that so distinguished a personage should have been so coolly deserted by the Duke of Medina. Don Pedro then returned to the *Revenge*, where, as the guest of Drake, he was a witness to all subsequent events up to the 10th of August, on which day he was sent to London with some other officers, Sir Francis claiming his ransom as his lawful due.

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Here certainly was no very triumphant beginning for the Invincible Armada. On the very first day of their being in presence of the English fleet—then but sixty-seven in number, and vastly their inferior in size and weight of metal—they had lost the flag ships of the Guipuzcoan and of the Andalusian squadrons, with a general-admiral, 450 officers and men, and some 100,000 ducats of treasure. They had been out-manoeuvred, out-sailed, and thoroughly maltreated by their antagonists, and they had been unable to inflict a single blow in return. Thus the “small fight” had been a cheerful one for the opponents of the Inquisition, and the English were proportionably encouraged.

On Monday, 1st of August, Medina Sidonia placed the rear-guard-consisting of the galeasses, the galleons St. Matthew, St. Luke, St. James, and the Florence and other ships, forty-three in all—under command of Don Antonio de Leyva. He was instructed to entertain the enemy—so constantly hanging on the rear—to accept every chance of battle, and to come to close quarters whenever it should be possible. The Spaniards felt confident of sinking every ship in the English navy, if they could but once come to grappling; but it was growing more obvious every hour that the giving or withholding battle was entirely in the hands of their foes. Meantime—while the rear was thus protected by Leyva's division—the vanguard and main body of the Armada, led by the captain-general, would steadily pursue its way, according to the royal instructions, until it arrived at its appointed meeting-place with the Duke of Parma. Moreover, the Duke of Medina—dissatisfied with the want of discipline and of good seamanship hitherto displayed in his fleet—now took occasion to send a serjeant-major, with written sailing directions, on board each ship in the Armada, with express orders to hang every captain, without appeal or consultation, who should leave the position assigned him; and the hangmen were sent with the serjeant-majors to ensure immediate attention to these arrangements. Juan Gil was at the same time sent off in a sloop to the Duke of Parma, to carry the news of the movements of the Armada, to request information as to the exact spot and moment of the junction, and to beg for pilots acquainted with the French and Flemish coasts. “In case of the slightest gale in the world,” said Medina, “I don't know how or where to shelter such large ships as ours.”

Disposed in this manner; the Spaniards sailed leisurely along the English coast with light westerly breezes, watched closely by the Queen's fleet, which hovered at a moderate distance to windward, without offering, that day, any obstruction to their course.

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By five o'clock on Tuesday morning, 2nd of August, the Armada lay between Portland Bill and St. Albans' Head, when the wind shifted to the north-east, and gave the Spaniards the weather-gage. The English did their best to get to windward, but the Duke, standing close into the land with the whole Armada, maintained his advantage. The English then went about, making a tack seaward, and were soon afterwards assaulted by the Spaniards. A long and spirited action ensued. Howard in his little Ark-Royal—"the odd ship of the world for all conditions"—was engaged at different times with Bertendona, of the Italian squadron, with Alonzo de Leyva in the Batta, and with other large vessels. He was hard pressed for a time, but was gallantly supported by the Nonpareil, Captain Tanner; and after a long and confused combat, in which the St. Mark, the St. Luke, the St. Matthew, the St. Philip, the St. John, the St. James, the St. John Baptist, the St. Martin, and many other great galleons, with saintly and apostolic names, fought pellmell with the Lion, the Bear, the Bull, the Tiger, the Dreadnought, the Revenge, the Victory, the Triumph, and other of the more profanely-baptized English ships, the Spaniards were again baffled in all their attempts to close with, and to board, their ever-attacking, ever-flying adversaries. The cannonading was incessant. "We had a sharp and a long fight," said Hawkins. Boat-loads of men and munitions were perpetually arriving to the English, and many, high-born volunteers—like Cumberland, Oxford, Northumberland, Raleigh, Brooke, Dudley, Willoughby, Noel, William Hatton, Thomas Cecil, and others—could no longer restrain their impatience, as the roar of battle sounded along the coasts of Dorset, but flocked merrily on board the ships of Drake,—Hawkins, Howard, and Frobisher, or came in small vessels which they had chartered for themselves, in order to have their share in the delights of the long-expected struggle.

The action, irregular, desultory, but lively, continued nearly all day, and until the English had fired away most of their powder and shot. The Spaniards, too, notwithstanding their years of preparation, were already sort of light metal, and Medina Sidonia had been daily sending to Parma for a Supply of four, six, and ten pound balls. So much lead and gunpowder had never before been wasted in a single day; for there was no great damage inflicted on either side. The artillery-practice was certainly not much to the credit of either nation.

"If her Majesty's ships had been manned with a full supply of good gunners," said honest William Thomas, an old artilleryman, "it would have been the woofullest time ever the Spaniard took in hand, and the most noble victory ever heard of would have been her Majesty's. But our sins were the cause that so much powder and shot were spent, so long time in fight, and in comparison so little harm done. It were greatly to be wished that her Majesty were no longer deceived in this way."

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Yet the English, at any rate, had succeeded in displaying their seamanship, if not their gunnery, to advantage. In vain the unwieldy hulks and galleons had attempted to grapple with their light-winged foes, who pelted them, braved them, damaged their sails and gearing; and then danced lightly off into the distance; until at last, as night fell, the wind came out from the west again, and the English regained and kept the weather-gage.

The Queen's fleet, now divided into four squadrons, under Howard, Drake, Hawkins, and Frobisher, amounted to near one hundred sail, exclusive of Lord Henry Seymour's division, which was cruising in the Straits of Dover. But few of all this number were ships of war however, and the merchant vessels; although zealous and active enough, were not thought very effective. "If you had seen the simple service done by the merchants and coast ships," said Winter, "you would have said we had been little holpen by them, otherwise than that they did make a show."

All night the Spaniards, holding their course towards Calais, after the long but indecisive conflict had terminated, were closely pursued by their wary antagonists. On Wednesday, 3rd of August, there was some slight cannonading, with but slender results; and on Thursday, the 4th, both fleets were off Dunnose, on the Isle of Wight. The great hulk Santana and a galleon of Portugal having been somewhat damaged the previous day, were lagging behind the rest of the Armada, and were vigorously attacked by the Triumph, and a few other vessels. Don Antonio de Leyva, with some of the galleasses and large galleons, came to the rescue, and Frobisher, although in much peril, maintained an unequal conflict, within close range, with great spirit.

Seeing his danger, the Lord Admiral in the Ark-Royal, accompanied by the Golden Lion; the White Bear, the Elizabeth, the Victory, and the Leicester, bore boldly down into the very midst of the Spanish fleet, and laid himself within three or four hundred yards of Medina's flag ship, the St. Martin, while his comrades were at equally close quarters with Vice-Admiral Recalde and the galleons of Oquendo, Mexia, and Almanza. It was the hottest conflict which had yet taken place. Here at last was thorough English work. The two, great fleets, which were there to subjugate and to defend the realm of Elizabeth, were nearly yard-arm and yard-arm together—all England on the lee. Broadside after broadside of great guns, volley after volley of arquebusry from maintop and rigging, were warmly exchanged, and much damage was inflicted on the Spaniards, whose gigantic ships, were so easy a mark to aim at, while from their turreted heights they themselves fired for the most part harmlessly over the heads of their adversaries. The leaders of the Armada, however, were encouraged, for they expected at last to come to even closer quarters, and there were some among the English who were mad enough to wish to board.

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But so soon as Frobisher, who was the hero of the day, had extricated himself from his difficulty, the Lord-Admiral—having no intention of risking the existence of his fleet, and with it perhaps of the English crown, upon the hazard of a single battle, and having been himself somewhat damaged in the fight—gave the signal for retreat, and caused the Ark-Royal to be towed out of action. Thus the Spaniards were frustrated of their hopes, and the English; having inflicted much punishment at comparatively small loss to themselves, again stood off to windward; and the Armada continued its indolent course along the cliffs of Freshwater and Blackgang.

On Friday; 5th August, the English, having received men and munitions from shore, pursued their antagonists at a moderate distance; and the Lord-Admiral; profiting by the pause—for, it was almost a flat calm— sent for Martin Frobisher, John Hawkins, Roger Townsend, Lord Thomas Howard, son of the Duke of Norfolk, and Lord Edmund Sheffield; and on the deck of the Royal Ark conferred the honour of knighthood on each for his gallantry in the action of the previous day. Medina Sidonia, on his part, was again despatching messenger after messenger to the Duke of Parma, asking for small shot, pilots, and forty fly-boats, with which to pursue the teasing English clippers. The Catholic Armada, he said, being so large and heavy, was quite in the power of its adversaries, who could assault, retreat, fight, or leave off fighting, while he had nothing for it but to proceed, as expeditiously as might be; to his rendezvous in Calais roads.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Inquisitors enough; but there were no light vessels in The Armada

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