

History of the United Netherlands from the Death of William the Silent to the Twelve Year's Truce, 1600-02 eBook

History of the United Netherlands from the Death of William the Silent to the Twelve Year's Truce, 1600-02 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. 74

History of the United Netherlands, 1600-1602

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Effects of the Nieuport campaign—The general and the statesman— The Roman empire and the Turk—Disgraceful proceedings of the mutinous soldiers in Hungary— The Dunkirk pirates—Siege of Ostend by the Archduke—Attack on Rheinberg by Prince Maurice—Siege and capitulation of Meura—Attempt on Bois-le-Duc—Concentration of the war at Ostend—Account of the belligerents—Details of the siege— Feigned offer of Sir Francis Vere to capitulate—Arrival of reinforcements from the States—Attack and overthrow of the besiegers.

The Nieuport campaign had exhausted for the time both belligerents. The victor had saved the republic from impending annihilation, but was incapable of further efforts



during the summer. The conquered cardinal-archduke, remaining essentially in the same position as before, consoled himself with the agreeable fiction that the States, notwithstanding their triumph, had in reality suffered the most in the great battle. Meantime both parties did their best to repair damages and to recruit their armies.

The States—or in other words Barneveld, who was the States—had learned a lesson. Time was to show whether it would be a profitable one, or whether Maurice, who was the preceptor of Europe in the art of war, would continue to be a docile pupil of the great Advocate even in military affairs. It is probable that the alienation between the statesman and the general, which was to widen as time advanced, may be dated from the day of Nieuport.

Fables have even been told which indicated the popular belief in an intensity of resentment on the part of the prince, which certainly did not exist till long afterwards.

“Ah, scoundrel!” the stadholder was said to have exclaimed, giving the Advocate a box on the ear as he came to wish him joy of his great victory, “you sold us, but God prevented your making the transfer.”

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History would disdain even an allusion to such figments—quite as disgraceful, certainly to Maurice as to Barneveld—did they not point the moral and foreshadow some of the vast but distant results of events which had already taken place, and had they not been so generally repeated that it is a duty for the lover of truth to put his foot upon the calumny, even at the risk for a passing moment of reviving it.

The condition of the war in Flanders had established a temporary equilibrium among the western powers—France and England discussing, intriguing, and combining in secret with each other, against each other, and in spite of each other, in regard to the great conflict—while Spain and the cardinal-archduke on the one side, and the republic on the other, prepared themselves for another encounter in the blood-stained arena.

Meantime, on the opposite verge of what was called European civilization, the perpetual war between the Roman Empire and the Grand Turk had for the moment been brought into a nearly similar equation. Notwithstanding the vast amount of gunpowder exploded during so many wearisome years, the problem of the Crescent and the Cross was not much nearer a solution in the East than was that of mass and conventicle in the West. War was the normal and natural condition of mankind. This fact, at least, seemed to have been acquired and added to the mass of human knowledge.

From the prolific womb of Germany came forth, to swell impartially the Protestant and Catholic hosts, vast swarms of human creatures. Sold by their masters at as high prices as could be agreed upon beforehand, and receiving for themselves five stivers a day, irregularly paid, until the carrion-crow rendered them the last service, they found at times more demand for their labor in the great European market than they could fully supply. There were not Germans enough every year for the consumption of the Turk, and the pope, and the emperor, and the republic, and the Catholic king, and the Christian king, with both ends of Europe ablaze at once. So it happened that the Duke of Mercoeur and other heroes of the League, having effected their reconciliation with the Bearnese, and for a handsome price paid down on the nail having acknowledged him to be their legitimate and Catholic sovereign, now turned their temporary attention to the Turk. The sweepings of the League—Frenchmen, Walloons, Germans, Italians, Spaniards—were tossed into Hungary, because for a season the war had become languid in Flanders. And the warriors grown grey in the religious wars of France astonished the pagans on the Danube by a variety of crimes and cruelties such as Christians only could imagine. Thus, while the forces of the Sultan were besieging Buda, a detachment of these ancient Leaguers lay in Pappa, a fortified town not far from Raab, which Archduke Maximilian had taken by storm two years before. Finding their existence monotonous and payments unpunctual,



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they rose upon the governor; Michael Maroti, and then entered into a treaty with the Turkish commander outside the walls. Bringing all the principal citizens of the town, their wives and children, and all their moveable property into the market-place, they offered to sell the lot, including the governor, for a hundred thousand rix dollars. The bargain was struck, and the Turk, paying him all his cash on hand and giving hostages for the remainder, carried off six hundred of the men and women, promising soon to return and complete the transaction. Meantime the imperial general, Schwartzenberg, came before the place, urging the mutineers with promises of speedy payment, and with appeals to their sense of shame, to abstain from the disgraceful work. He might as well have preached to the wild swine swarming in the adjacent forests. Siege thereupon was laid to the place. In a sortie the brave Schwartzenberg was killed, but Colonitz coming up in force the mutineers were locked up in the town which they had seized, and the Turk never came to their relief. Famine drove them at last to choose between surrender and a desperate attempt to cut their way out. They took the bolder course, and were all either killed or captured. And now—the mutineers having given the Turk this lesson in Christian honour towards captives—their comrades and the rest of the imperial forces showed them the latest and most approved Christian method of treating mutineers. Several hundred of the prisoners were distributed among the different nationalities composing the army to be dealt with at pleasure. The honest Germans were the most straightforward of all towards their portion of the prisoners, for they shot them down at once, without an instant's hesitation. But the Lorrainers, the remainder of the French troops, the Walloons, and especially the Hungarians—whose countrymen and women had been sold into captivity—all vied with each other in the invention of cruelties at which the soul sickens, and which the pen almost refuses to depict.

These operations and diversions had no sensible effect upon the progress of the war, which crept on with the same monotonous and sluggish cruelty as ever; but the incidents narrated paint the course of civilization more vividly than the detailed accounts of siege and battle; mining and countermining, assaults and ambuscades can do, of which the history books are full. The leaguers of Buda and of other cities and fortresses in Hungary went their course; and it was destined to remain for a still longer season doubtful whether Cross or Crescent should ultimately wave over the whole territory of Eastern Europe, and whether the vigorous Moslem, believing in himself, his mission, his discipline, and his resources, should ultimately absorb what was left of the ancient Roman Empire.

Meantime, such of the Walloons, Lorrainers, Germans, and Frenchmen as had grown wearied of the fighting on the Danube and the Theiss—might have recourse for variety to the perpetual carnage on the Meuse, the Rhine, and the Scheld. If there was not bloodshed enough for all, it was surely not the fault of Mahomet, nor Clement, nor Philip.



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During the remainder of the year not much was done in of the stadholder or the cardinal, but there was immense damage done to the Dutch shipping by the famous privateersman, Van der Waecken, with his squadron of twelve or fourteen armed cruisers. In vain had the States exerted themselves to destroy the robbers cave, Dunkirk. Shiploads of granite had been brought from Norway, and stone fleets had been sunk in the channel, but the insatiable quicksands had swallowed them as fast as they could be deposited, the tide rolled as freely as before, and the bold pirates sailed forth as gaily as ever to prey upon the defenceless trading vessels and herring-smacks of the States. For it was only upon non-combatants that Admiral Van der Waecken made war, and the fishermen especially, who mainly belonged to the Memnonite religion, with its doctrines of non-resistance—not a very comfortable practice in that sanguinary age—were his constant victims. And his cruelties might have almost served as a model to the Christian warriors on the Turkish frontier. After each vessel had been rifled of everything worth possessing, and then scuttled, the admiral would order the crews to be, thrown overboard at once, or, if he chanced to be in a merry mood, would cause them to be fastened to the cabin floor, or nailed crossways on the deck and then would sail away leaving ship and sailors to sink at leisure. The States gave chase as well as they could to the miscreant— a Dutchman born, and with a crew mainly composed of renegade Netherlanders and other outcasts, preying for base lucre on their defenceless countryman—and their cruisers were occasionally fortunate enough to capture and bring in one of the pirate ships. In such cases, short shrift was granted, and the buccaneers were hanged without mercy, thirty-eight having been executed in one morning at Rotterdam. The admiral with most of his vessels escaped, however, to the coast of Spain, where his crews during the autumn mainly contrived to desert, and where he himself died in the winter, whether from malady, remorse, or disappointment at not being rewarded by a high position in the Spanish navy.

The war was in its old age. The leaf of a new century had been turned, and men in middle life had never known what the word Peace meant. Perhaps they could hardly imagine such a condition. This is easily said, but it is difficult really to picture to ourselves the moral constitution of a race of mankind which had been born and had grown up, marrying and giving in marriage, dying and burying their dead, and so passing on from the cradle towards the grave, accepting the eternal clang of arms, and the constant participation by themselves and those nearest to them in the dangers, privations, and horrors of siege and battle-field as the commonplaces of life. At least, those Netherlanders knew what fighting for independence of a foreign tyrant meant. They must have hated Spain very thoroughly, and believed in the right of man to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience, and to govern himself upon his own soil, however meagre, very earnestly, or they would hardly have spent their blood and treasure, year after year; with such mercantile regularity when it was always in their power to make peace by giving up the object for which they had been fighting.



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Yet the war, although in its old age, was not fallen into decrepitude. The most considerable and most sanguinary pitched battle of what then were modern times had just been fought, and the combatants were preparing themselves for a fresh wrestle, as if the conflict had only begun. And now—although the great leaguers of Harlem, Leyden, and Antwerp, as well as the more recent masterpieces of Prince Maurice in Gelderland and Friesland were still fresh in men's memory—there was to be a siege, which for endurance, pertinacity, valour, and bloodshed on both sides, had not yet been foreshadowed, far less equalled, upon the fatal Netherland soil.

That place of fashionable resort, where the fine folk of Europe now bathe, and flirt, and prattle politics or scandal so cheerfully during the summer solstice—cool and comfortable Ostend—was throughout the sixteenth century as obscure a fishing village as could be found in Christendom. Nothing, had ever happened there, nobody had ever lived there, and it was not until a much later period that the famous oyster, now identified with its name, had been brought to its bay to be educated. It was known for nothing except for claiming to have invented the pickling of herrings, which was not at all the fact. Towards the latter part of the century, however, the poor little open village had been fortified to such purpose as to enable it to beat off the great Alexander Farnese, when he had made an impromptu effort to seize it in the year 1583, after his successful enterprise against Dunkirk and Nieuport, and subsequent preparation had fortunately been made against any further attempt. For in the opening period of the new century thousands and tens of thousands were to come to those yellow sands, not for a midsummer holiday, but to join hands in one of the most enduring struggles that history had yet recorded, and on which the attention of Europe was for a long time to be steadily fixed.

Ostend—East-end—was the only possession of the republic in Flanders. Having been at last thoroughly fortified according to the principles of the age, it was a place whence much damage was inflicted upon the enemy, and whence forays upon the obedient Flemings could very successfully be conducted. Being in the hands of so enterprising a naval power, it controlled the coast, while the cardinal-archduke on the other side fondly hoped that its possession would give him supremacy on the sea. The States of Flanders declared it to be a thorn in the Belgic lion's foot, and called urgently upon their sovereign to remove the annoyance.

They offered Albert 300,000 florins a month so long as the siege should last, besides an extraordinary sum of 300,000, of which one third was to be paid when the place should be invested, one-third when the breach had been made, and one-third after the town had been taken. It was obvious that, although they thought the extraction of the thorn might prove troublesome, the process would be accomplished within a reasonable time. The cardinal-archduke, on his part, was as anxious as the "members" of Flanders. Asking how long the Duke of Parma had been in taking Antwerp, and being told "eighteen months," he replied that, if necessary, he was willing to employ eighteen years in reducing Ostend.



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The town thus about to assume so much importance in the world's eye had about three thousand inhabitants within its lowly; thatch-roofed houses. It fronted directly upon the seacoast and stretched backward in a southerly direction, having the sandy downs on the right and left, and a swampy, spongy soil on the inner verge, where it communicated with the land. Its northern part, small and scarcely inhabited, was lashed by the ocean, and exposed to perpetual danger from its storms and flood-tides, but was partially protected from these encroachments by a dyke stretching along the coast on the west. Here had hitherto been the harbour formed by the mouth of the river Iperleda as it mingled with the sea, but this entrance had become so choked with sand as to be almost useless at low water. This circumstance would have rendered the labours of the archduke comparatively easy, and much discouraged the States, had there not fortunately been a new harbour which had formed itself on the eastern side exactly at the period of threatened danger. The dwarf mountain range of dunes which encircled the town on the eastern side had been purposely levelled, lest the higher summits should offer positions of vantage to a besieging foe. In consequence of this operation, the sea had burst over the land and swept completely around the place, almost converting it into an island, while at high water there opened a wide and profound gulf which with the ebb left an excellent channel quite deep enough for even the ships of war of those days. The next care of the States authorities was to pierce their fortifications on this side at a convenient point, thus creating a safe and snug haven within the walls for the fleets of transports which were soon to arrive by open sea, laden with soldiers and munitions.

The whole place was about half an hour's walk in circumference. It was surrounded with a regular counterscarp, bastions, and casemates, while the proximity of the ocean and the humid nature of the soil ensured it a network of foss and canal on every side. On the left or western side, where the old harbour had once been, and which was the most vulnerable by nature, was a series of strong ravelins, the most conspicuous of which were called the Sand Hill, the Porcupine, and Hell's Mouth. Beyond these, towards the southwest, were some detached fortifications, resting for support, however, upon the place itself, called the Polder, the Square, and the South Square. On the east side, which was almost inaccessible, as it would seem, by such siege machinery as then existed, was a work called the Spanish half-moon, situate on the new harbour called the Guele or Gullet.

Towards the west and southwest, externally, upon the territory of Flanders—not an inch of which belonged to the republic, save the sea-beaten corner in which nestled the little town—eighteen fortresses had been constructed by the archduke as a protection against hostile incursions from the place. Of these, the most considerable were St. Albert, often mentioned during the Nieuport campaign, St. Isabella St. Clara, and Great-Thirst.



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On the 5th July, 1601, the archduke came before the town, and formally began the siege. He established his headquarters in the fort which bore the name of his patron saint. Frederic van den Berg meanwhile occupied fort Breden on the eastern side, with the intention, if possible, of getting possession of the Gullet, or at least of rendering the entrance to that harbour impossible by means of his hostile demonstrations. Under Van den Berg was Count Bucquoy-Longueval, a Walloon officer of much energy and experience, now general-in-chief of artillery in the archduke's army.

The numbers with which Albert took the field at first have not been accurately stated, but it is probable that his object was to keep as many as twenty thousand constantly engaged in the siege, and that in this regard he was generally successful.

Within the town were fifty-nine companies of infantry, to which were soon added twenty-three more under command of young Chatillon, grandson of the great Coligny. It was "an olla podrida of nationalities," according to the diarist of the siege—[Meteren]. English, Scotch, Dutch, Flemings, Frenchmen, Germans, mixed in about equal proportions. Commander-in-chief at the outset was Sir Francis Vere, who established himself by the middle of July in the place, sent thither by order of the States-General. It had been the desire of that assembly that the stadholder should make another foray in Flanders for the purpose of driving off the archduke before he should have time to complete his preliminary operations. But for that year at least Maurice was resolved not to renounce his own schemes in deference to those so much more ignorant than himself of the art of war, even if Barneveld and his subordinates on their part had not learned a requisite lesson of modesty.

So the prince, instead of risking another Nieuport campaign, took the field with a small but well-appointed force, about ten thousand men in all, marched to the Rhine, and early in June, laid siege to Rheinberg. It was his purpose to leave the archduke for the time to break his teeth against the walls of Ostend, while he would himself protect the eastern frontier, over which came regular reinforcements and supplies for the Catholic armies. His works were laid out with his customary precision and neatness. But, standing as usual, like a professor at his blackboard, demonstrating his proposition to the town, he was disturbed in his calculations by the abstraction from his little army of two thousand English troops ordered by the States-General to march to the defence of Ostend. The most mathematical but most obedient of princes, annoyed but not disconcerted, sent off the troops but continued his demonstration.

"By this specimen," cried the French envoy, with enthusiasm, "judge of the energy of this little commonwealth. They are besieging Berg with an army of twelve thousand men, a place beyond the frontier, and five days' march from the Hague. They are defending another important place, besieged by the principal forces of the archdukes, and there is good chance of success at both points. They are doing all this too with such a train of equipages of artillery, of munitions, of barks, of ships of war, that I hardly

know of a monarch in the world who would not be troubled to furnish such a force of warlike machinery.”

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By the middle of July he sprang a mine under the fortifications, doing much damage and sending into the air a considerable portion of the garrison. Two of the soldiers were blown into his own camp, and one of them, strangely enough, was but slightly injured. Coming as he did through the air at cannon-ball speed, he was of course able to bring the freshest intelligence from the interior of the town.

His news as to the condition of the siege confirmed the theory of the stadholder. He persisted in his operations for three weeks longer, and the place was then surrendered. The same terms—moderate and honourable were given to the garrison and the burghers as in all Maurice's victories. Those who liked to stay were at liberty to do so, accepting the prohibition of public worship according to the Roman ritual, but guaranteed against inquisition into household or conscience. The garrison went out with the honours of war, and thus the place, whose military value caused it to change hands almost as frequently as a counter in a game, was once more in possession of the republic. In the course of the following week Maurice laid siege to the city of Meurs, a little farther up the Rhine, which immediately capitulated. Thus the keys to the debatable land of Cleves and Juliers, the scene of the Admiral of Arragon's recent barbarities, were now held by the stadholder.

These achievements were followed by an unsuccessful attempt upon Bois-le-Duc in the course of November. The place would have fallen notwithstanding the slenderness of the besieging army had not a sudden and severe frost caused the prudent prince to raise the siege. Feeling that his cousin Frederic van den Berg, who had been despatched from before Ostend to command the relieving force near Bois-le-Duc, might take advantage of the prematurely frozen canals and rivers to make an incursion into Holland, he left his city just as his works had been sufficiently advanced to ensure possession of the prize, and hastened to protect the heart of the republic from possible danger.

Nothing further was accomplished by Maurice that year, but meantime something had been doing within and around Ostend.

For now the siege of Ostend became the war, and was likely to continue to be the war for a long time to come; all other military operations being to a certain degree suspended, as if by general consent of both belligerents, or rendered subsidiary to the main design. So long as this little place should be beleaguered it was the purpose of the States, and of Maurice, acting in harmony with those authorities, to concentrate their resources so as to strengthen the grip with which the only scrap of Flanders was held by the republic,

And as time wore on, the supposed necessities of the wealthy province, which, in political importance, made up a full half of the archduke's dominions, together with self-esteem and an exaggerated idea of military honour, made that prelate more and more determined to effect his purpose.



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So upon those barren sands was opened a great academy in which the science and the art of war were to be taught by the most skilful practitioners to all Europe; for no general, corporal, artillerist, barber-surgeon, or engineer, would be deemed to know his trade if he had not fought at Ostend; and thither resorted month after month warriors of every rank, from men of royal or of noblest blood to adventurers of lowlier degree, whose only fortune was buckled at their sides. From every land, of every religion, of every race, they poured into the town or into the besiegers' trenches. Habsburg and Holstein; Northumberland, Vere, and Westmoreland; Fairfax and Stuart; Bourbon, Chatillon, and Lorraine; Bentivoglio, Farnese, Spinola, Grimaldi, Arragon, Toledo, Avila, Berlaymont, Bucquoy, Nassau, Orange, Solms—such were the historic names of a few only of the pupils or professors in that sanguinary high school, mingled with the plainer but well known patronymics of the Baxes, Meetkerkes, Van Loons, Marquettes, Van der Meers, and Barendrechts, whose bearers were fighting, as they long had fought, for all that men most dearly prize on earth, and not to win honour or to take doctors' degrees in blood. Papist, Calvinist, Lutheran, Turk, Jew and Moor, European, Asiatic, African, all came to dance in that long carnival of death; and every incident, every detail throughout the weary siege could if necessary be reproduced; for so profound and general was the attention excited throughout Christendom by these extensive operations, and so new and astonishing were many of the inventions and machines employed—most of them now as familiar as gunpowder or as antiquated as a catapult—that contemporaries have been most bountiful in their records for the benefit of posterity, feeling sure of a gratitude which perhaps has not been rendered to their shades.

Especially the indefatigable Philip Fleming—auditor and secretary of Ostend before and during the siege, bravest, most conscientious, and most ingenious of clerks—has chronicled faithfully in his diary almost every cannon-shot that was fired, house that was set on fire, officer that was killed, and has portrayed each new machine that was invented or imagined by native or foreign genius. For the adepts or pretenders who swarmed to town or camp from every corner of the earth, bringing in their hands or brains to be disposed of by either belligerents infallible recipes for terminating the siege at a single blow, if only their theories could be understood and their pockets be filled, were as prolific and as sanguine as in every age. But it would be as wearisome, and in regard to the history of human culture as superfluous, to dilate upon the technics of Targone and Giustianini, and the other engineers, Italian and Flemish, who amazed mankind at this period by their successes, still more by their failures, or to describe every assault, sortie, and repulse, every excavation, explosion, and cannonade, as to disinter the details of the siege of Nineveh or of Troy. But there is one kind of enginry which never loses its value or its interest, and which remains the same in every age—the machinery by which stout hearts act directly upon willing hands—and vast were the results now depending on its employment around Ostend.



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On the outside and at a distance the war was superintended of course by the stadholder and commander-in-chief, while his cousin William Lewis, certainly inferior to no living man in the science of war, and whose studies in military literature, both ancient and modern, during the brief intervals of his active campaigning, were probably more profound than those of any contemporary, was always alert and anxious to assist with his counsels or to mount and ride to the fray.

In the town Sir Francis Vere commanded. Few shapes are more familiar to the student of those times than this veteran campaigner, the offshoot of a time-honoured race. A man of handsome, weather-beaten, battle-bronzed visage, with massive forehead, broad intelligent eyes, a high straight nose, close-clipped hair, and a great brown beard like a spade; captious, irascible, but most resolute, he seemed, in his gold inlaid Milan corslet and ruff of point-lace, the very image of a partizan chieftain; one of the noblest relics of a race of fighters slowly passing off the world's stage.

An efficient colonel, he was not a general to be relied upon in great affairs either in council or the field. He hated the Nassaus, and the Nassaus certainly did not admire him, while his inordinate self-esteem, both personal and national, and his want of true sympathy for the cause in which, he fought, were the frequent source of trouble and danger to the republic.

Of the seven or eight thousand soldiers in the town when the siege began, at least two thousand were English. The queen, too intelligent, despite her shrewishness to the Staten; not to be faithful to the cause in which her own interests were quite as much involved as theirs, had promised Envoy Caron that although she was obliged to maintain twenty thousand men in Ireland to keep down the rebels, directly leagued as they were with Spain and the archdukes, the republic might depend upon five thousand soldiers from England. Detachment after detachment, the soldiers came as fast as the London prisons could be swept and the queen's press-gang perform its office. It may be imagined that the native land of those warriors was not inconsiderably benefited by the grant to the republic of the right to make and pay for these levies. But they had all red uniforms, and were as fit as other men to dig trenches, to defend them; and to fill them afterwards, and none could fight more manfully or plunder friend and foe with greater cheerfulness of impartiality than did those islanders.

The problem which the archduke had set himself to solve was not an easy one. He was to reduce a town, which he could invest and had already succeeded very thoroughly in investing on the land aide, but which was open to the whole world by sea; while the besieged on their part could not only rely upon their own Government and people, who were more at home on the ocean than was any nation in the world, but upon their alliance with England, a State hardly inferior in maritime resources to the republic itself.



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On the western side, which was the weakest, his progress was from the beginning the more encouraging, and his batteries were soon able to make some impression upon the outer works, and even to do considerable damage to the interior of the town. In the course of a few months he had fifty siege-guns in position, and had constructed a practicable road all around the place, connecting his own fortifications on the west and south with those of Bucquoy on the east.

Albert's leading thought however was to cut off the supplies. The freaks of nature, as already observed, combined with his own exertions, had effectually disposed of the western harbour as a means of ingress. The tide ebbed and flowed through the narrow channel, but it was clogged with sand and nearly, dry at low water. Moreover, by an invention then considered very remarkable, a foundation was laid for the besiegers' forts and batteries by sinking large and deep baskets of wicker-work, twenty feet in length, and filled with bricks and sand, within this abandoned harbour. These clumsy machines were called sausages,²¹ and were the delight of the camp and of all Europe. The works thus established on the dry side crept slowly on towards the walls, and some demi-cannon were soon placed upon, them, but the besieged, not liking these encroachments, took the resolution to cut the pea-dyke along the coast which had originally protected the old harbour. Thus the sea, when the tides were high and winds boisterous, was free to break in upon the archduke's works, and would often swallow sausages, men, and cannon far more rapidly than it was possible to place them there.

Yet still those human ants toiled on, patiently restoring what the elements so easily destroyed; and still, despite the sea; the cannonade, and the occasional sorties of the garrison, the danger came nearer and nearer. Bucquoy on the other side was pursuing the same system, but his task was immeasurably more difficult. The Gullet, or new eastern entrance, was a whirlpool at high tide, deep, broad, and swift as a millrace. Yet along its outer verge he too laid his sausages, protecting his men at their work as well as he could with gabions, and essayed to build a dyke of wicker-work upon which he might place a platform for artillery to prevent the ingress of the republican ships.

And his soldiers were kept steadily at work, exposed all the time to the guns of the Spanish half-moon from which the besieged never ceased to cannonade those industrious pioneers. It was a bloody business. Night and day the men were knee-deep in the trenches delving in mud and sand, falling every instant into the graves which they were thus digging for themselves, while ever and anon the sea would rise in its wrath and sweep them with their works away. Yet the victims were soon replaced by others, for had not the cardinal-archduke sworn to extract the thorn from the Belgic lion's paw even if he should be eighteen

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years about it, and would military honour permit him to break his vow? It was a piteous sight, even for the besieged, to see human life so profusely squandered. It is a terrible reflection, too, that those Spaniards, Walloons, Italians, confronted death so eagerly, not from motives of honour, religion, discipline, not inspired by any kind of faith or fanaticism, but because the men who were employed in this horrible sausage-making and dyke-building were promised five stivers a day instead of two.

And there was always an ample supply of volunteers for the service so long as the five stivers were paid.

But despite all Bucquoy's exertions the east harbour remained as free as ever. The cool, wary Dutch skippers brought in their cargoes as regularly as if there had been no siege at all. Ostend was rapidly acquiring greater commercial importance, and was more full of bustle and business than had ever been dreamed of in that quiet nook since the days of Robert the Frisian, who had built the old church of Ostend, as one of the thirty which he erected in honour of St. Peter, five hundred years before.

For the States did not neglect their favourite little city. Fleets of transports arrived day after day, week after week, laden with every necessary and even luxury for the use of the garrison. It was perhaps the cheapest place in all the Netherlands, so great was the abundance. Capons, bares, partridges, and butcher's meat were plentiful as blackberries, and good French claret was but two stivers the quart. Certainly the prospect was not promising of starving the town into a surrender.

But besides all this digging and draining there was an almost daily cannonade. Her Royal Highness the Infanta was perpetually in camp by the side of her well-beloved Albert, making her appearance there in great state, with eighteen coaches full of ladies of honour, and always manifesting much impatience if she did not hear the guns.

She would frequently touch off a forty-pounder with her own serene fingers in order to encourage the artillerymen, and great was the enthusiasm which such condescension excited.

Assaults, sorties, repulses, ambuscades were also of daily occurrence, and often with very sanguinary results; but it would be almost as idle now to give the details of every encounter that occurred, as to describe the besieging of a snow-fort by schoolboys.

It is impossible not to reflect that a couple of Parrots and a Monitor or two would have terminated the siege in half an hour in favor of either party, and levelled the town or the besiegers' works as if they had been of pasteboard.



Bucquoy's dyke was within a thousand yards of the harbour's entrance, yet the guns on his platform never sank a ship nor killed a man on board, while the archduke's batteries were even nearer their mark. Yet it was the most prodigious siege of modern days. Fifty great guns were in position around the place, and their balls weighed from ten to forty pounds apiece. It was generally agreed that no such artillery practice had ever occurred before in the world.

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For the first six months, and generally throughout the siege, there was fired on an average a thousand of such shots a day. In the sieges of the American civil war there were sometimes three thousand shots an hour, and from guns compared to which in calibre and power those cannon and demi-cannon were but children's toys.

Certainly the human arm was of the same length then as now, a pike-thrust was as effective as the stab of the most improved bayonet, and when it came, as it was always the purpose to do, to the close embrace of foemen, the work was done as thoroughly as it could be in this second half of the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless it is impossible not to hope that such progress in science must at last render long wars impossible. The Dutch war of independence had already lasted nearly forty years. Had the civil war in America upon the territory of half a continent been waged with the Ostend machinery it might have lasted two centuries. Something then may have been gained for humanity by giving war such preter-human attributes as to make its demands of gold and blood too exhaustive to become chronic.

Yet the loss of human life during that summer and winter was sufficiently wholesale as compared with the meagre results. Blood flowed in torrents, for no man could be more free of his soldiers' lives than was the cardinal-archduke, hurling them as he did on the enemy's works before the pretence of a practical breach had been effected, and before a reasonable chance existed of purchasing an advantage at such a price. Five hundred were killed outright in half-an-hour's assault on an impregnable position one autumn evening, and lay piled in heaps beneath the Sand Hill fort-many youthful gallants from Spain and Italy among them, noble volunteers recognised by their perfumed gloves and golden chains, and whose pockets were worth rifling. The Dutch surgeons, too, sallied forth in strength after such an encounter, and brought in great bags filled with human fat esteemed the sovereignst remedy in the world for wounds and disease.

Leaders were killed on both sides. Catrici, chief of the Italian artillery, and Braccamonte, commander of a famous Sicilian legion, with many less-known captains, lost their lives before the town. The noble young Chatillon, grandson of Coligny, who had distinguished himself at Nieuport, fell in the Porcupine fort, his head carried off by a cannon-ball, which destroyed another officer at his side, and just grazed the ear of the distinguished Colonel Uchtenbroek. Sir Francis Vere, too, was wounded in the head by a fragment of iron, and was obliged to leave the town for six weeks till his wound should heal.

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The unfortunate inhabitants—men, women, and children—were of course exposed to perpetual danger, and very many were killed. Their houses were often burned to the ground, in which cases the English auxiliaries were indefatigable, not in rendering assistance, but in taking possession of such household goods as the flames had spared. Nor did they always wait for such opportunities, but were apt, at the death of an eminent burgher, to constitute themselves at once universal legatees. Thus, while honest Bartholomew Tysen, a worthy citizen grocer, was standing one autumn morning at his own door, a stray cannon-ball took off his head, and scarcely had he been put in a coffin before his house was sacked from garret to cellar and all the costly spices, drugs, and other valuable merchandize of his warehouse—the chief magazine in the town—together with all his household furniture, appropriated by those London warriors. Bartholomew's friends and relatives appealed to Sir Francis Vere for justice, but were calmly informed by that general that Ostend was like a stranded ship, on its beamends on a beach, and that it was impossible not to consider it at the mercy of the wreckers. So with this highly figurative view of the situation from the lips of the governor of the place and the commander-in-chief of the English as well as the Dutch garrison, they were fain to go home and bury their dead, finding when they returned that another cannonball had carried away poor Bartholomew's coffin-lid. Thus was never non-combatant and grocer, alive or dead, more out of suits with fortune than this citizen of Ostend; and such were the laws of war, as understood by one of the most eminent of English practitioners in the beginning of the seventeenth century. It is true, however, that Vere subsequently hanged a soldier for stealing fifty pounds of powder and another for uttering counterfeit money, but robberies upon the citizens were unavenged.

Nor did the deaths by shot or sword-stroke make up the chief sum of mortality. As usual the murrain-like pestilence which swept off its daily victims both within and without the town, was more effective than any direct agency of man. By the month of December the number of the garrison had been reduced to less than three thousand, while it is probable that the archduke had not eight thousand effective men left in his whole army.

It was a black and desolate scene. The wild waves of the German ocean, lashed by the wintry gales, would often sweep over the painfully constructed works of besieger and besieged and destroy in an hour the labour of many weeks. The Porcupine's small but vitally-important ravelin lying out in the counterscarp between the old town and the new, guarding the sluices by which the water for the town moats and canals was controlled, and preventing the pioneers of the enemy from undermining the western wall—was so damaged by the sea as to be growing almost untenable. Indefatigably had the besieged attempted with wicker-work

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and timber and palisades to strengthen this precious little fort, but they had found, even as Bucquoy and the archduke on their part had learned, that the North Sea in winter was not to be dammed by bulrushes. Moreover, in a bold and successful assault the besiegers had succeeded in setting fire to the inflammable materials heaped about the ravelin to such effect that the fire burned for days, notwithstanding the flooding of the works at each high tide. The men, working day and night, scorching in the flames, yet freezing kneedeep in the icy slush of the trenches and perpetually under fire of the hostile batteries, became daily more and more exhausted, notwithstanding their determination to hold the place. Christmas drew nigh, and a most gloomy, festival it was like to be, for it seemed as if the beleaguered garrison had been forgotten by the States. Weeks had passed away without a single company being sent to repair the hideous gaps made daily in the ranks of those defenders of a forlorn hope. It was no longer possible to hold the external works; the Square, the Polder, and the other forts on the southwest which Vere had constructed with so much care and where he had thus far kept his headquarters. On Sunday morning,—23rd December, he reluctantly gave orders that they should be abandoned on the following day and the whole garrison concentrated within the town.

The clouds were gathering darkly over the head of the gallant Vere; for no sooner had he arrived at this determination than he learned from a deserter that the archduke had fixed upon that very Sunday evening for a general assault upon the place. It was hopeless for the garrison to attempt to hold these outer forts, for they required a far larger number of soldiers than could be spared from the attenuated little army. Yet with those forts in the hands of the enemy there would be nothing left but to make the best and speediest terms that might be obtained. The situation was desperate. Sir Francis called his principal officers together, announced his resolve not to submit to the humiliation of a surrender after all their efforts, if there was a possibility of escape from their dilemma, reminded them that reinforcements might be expected to arrive at any moment, and that with even a few hundred additional soldiers the outer works might still be manned and the city saved. The officers English, Dutch, and French, listened respectfully to his remarks, but, without any suggestions on their own part, called on him as their Alexander to untie the Gordian knot. Alexander solved it, not with the sword, but with a trick which he hoped might prove sharper than a sword. He announced his intention of proposing at once to treat, and to protract the negotiations as long as possible, until the wished-for sails should be discerned in the offing, when he would at once break faith with them, resume hostilities, and so make fools of the besiegers.

This was a device worthy of a modern Alexander whose surname was Farnese. Even in that loose age such cynical trifling with the sacredness of trumpets of truce and offers of capitulation were deemed far from creditable among soldiers and statesmen, yet the council of war highly applauded the scheme, and importuned the general to carry it at once into effect.



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When it came, however, to selecting the hostages necessary for the proposed negotiations, they became less ardent and were all disposed to recede. At last, after much discussion, the matter was settled, and before nightfall a drummer was set upon the external parapet of the Porcupine, who forthwith began to beat vigorously for a parley. The rattle was a welcome sound in the ears of the weary besiegers, just drawn up in column for a desperate assault, and the tidings were at once communicated to the archduke in Fort St. Albert. The prince manifested at first some unwillingness to forego the glory of the attack, from which he confidently expected a crowning victory, but yielding to the representations of his chief generals that it was better to have his town without further bloodshed, he consented to treat. Hostages were expeditiously appointed on both sides, and Captains Ogle and Fairfax were sent that same evening to the headquarters of the besieging army. It was at once agreed as a preliminary that the empty outer works of the place should remain unmolested. The English officers were received with much courtesy. The archduke lifted his hat as they were presented, asked them of what nation they were, and then inquired whether they were authorized to agree upon terms of capitulation. They answered in the negative; adding, that the whole business would be in the hands of commissioners to be immediately sent by his Highness, as it was supposed, into the town. Albert then expressed the hope that there was no fraudulent intention in the proposition just made to negotiate. The officers professed themselves entirely ignorant of any contemplated deception; although Captain Ogle had been one of the council, had heard every syllable of Vere's stratagem, and had heartily approved of the whole plot. The Englishmen were then committed to the care of a Spanish nobleman of the duke's staff, and were treated with perfect politeness and hospitality.

Meantime no time was lost in despatching hostages, who should be at the same time commissioners, to Ostend. The quartermaster-general of the army, Don Matteo Antonio, and Matteo Serrano, governor of Sluys, but serving among the besiegers, were selected for this important business as personages of ability, discretion, and distinction.

They reached the town, coming in of course from the western side, as expeditiously as possible, but after nightfall. Before they arrived at headquarters there suddenly arose, from some unknown cause, a great alarm and beating to arms on the opposite or eastern side of the city. They were entirely innocent of any participation in this uproar and ignorant of its cause, but when they reached the presence of Sir Francis Vere they found that warrior in a towering passion. There was cheating going on, he exclaimed. The Spaniards, he cried, were taking advantage of these negotiations, and were about, by dishonourable stratagem, to assault the town.



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Astounded, indignant, but utterly embarrassed, the grave Spaniards knew not how to reply. They were still more amazed when the general, rising to a still higher degree of exasperation, absolutely declined to exchange another word with them, but ordered Captains Carpentier and St. Hilaire, by whom they had been escorted to his quarters, to conduct them out of the town again by the same road which had brought them there. There was nothing for it but to comply, and to smother their resentment at such extraordinary treatment as best they could. When they got to the old harbour on the western side the tide had risen so high that it was impossible to cross.

Nobody knew better than Vere, when he gave the order, that this would be the case; so that when the escorting officers returned to state the fact, he simply ordered them to take the Spaniards back by the Gullet or eastern side. The strangers were not very young men, and being much fatigued with wandering to and fro in the darkness over the muddy roads, they begged permission to remain all night in Ostend, if it were only in a guardhouse. But Vere was inexorable, after the duplicity which he affected to have discovered on the part of the enemy. So the quartermaster-general and the governor of Sluys, much to the detriment of their dignity, were forced once more to tramp through the muddy streets. And obeying their secret instructions, the escort led them round and round through the most miry and forlorn parts of the town, so that, sinking knee-deep at every step into sloughs and quicksands, and plunging about through the mist and sleet of a dreary December's night, they at last reached the precincts of the Spanish half-moon on the Gullet, be-draggled from head to foot and in a most dismal and exhausted condition.

"Ah, the villainous town of Ostend!" exclaimed Serrano, ruefully contemplating his muddy boots and imploring at least a pipe of tobacco. He was informed, however, that no such medical drugs were kept in the fort, but that a draught of good English ale was much at their service. The beer was brought in four foaming flagons, and, a little refreshed by this hospitality, the Spaniards were put in a boat and rowed under the guns of the fort across the Gullet and delivered to their own sentries on the outposts of Bucquoy's entrenchments. By this time it was midnight, so that it was necessary for them to remain for the night in the eastern encampment before reporting themselves at Fort St. Albert.

Thus far Vere's comedy had been eminently successful, and by taking advantage of the accidental alarm and so adroitly lashing himself into a fictitious frenzy, the general had gained nearly twenty-four additional hours of precious time on which he had not reckoned.

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Next morning, after Serrano and Antonio had reported to the archduke, it was decided, notwithstanding the very inhospitable treatment which they had received, that those commissioners should return to their labours. Ogle and Fairfax still remained as hostages in camp, and of course professed entire ignorance of these extraordinary proceedings, attributing them to some inexplicable misunderstanding. So on Monday, 24th, December, the quartermaster and the governor again repaired to Ostend with orders to bring about the capitulation of the place as soon as possible. The same sergeant-major was again appointed by Vere to escort the strangers, and on asking by what way he should bring them in, was informed by Sir Francis that it would never do to allow those gentlemen, whose feet were accustomed to the soft sand of the sea-beach and downs, to bruise themselves upon the hard paving-stones of Ostend, but that the softest and muddiest road must be carefully selected for them. These reasons accordingly were stated with perfect gravity to the two Spaniards, who, in spite of their solemn remonstrances, were made to repeat a portion of their experiences and to accept it as an act of special courtesy from the English general. Thus so much time had been spent in preliminaries and so much more upon the road that the short winter's day was drawing to a close before they were again introduced to the presence of Vere.

They found that fiery personage on this occasion all smiles and blandishments. The Spaniards were received with most dignified courtesy, to which they gravely responded; and the general then proceeded to make excuses for the misunderstanding of the preceding day with its uncomfortable consequences. Thereupon arose much animated discussion as to the causes and the nature of the alarm on the east side which had created such excitement. Much time was ingeniously consumed in this utterly superfluous discussion; but at last the commissioners of the archduke insisted on making allusion to the business which had brought them to the town. "What terms of negotiation do you propose?" they asked Sir Francis. "His Highness has only to withdraw from before Ostend," coolly replied the general, "and leave us, his poor neighbours, in peace and quietness. This would be the most satisfactory negotiation possible and the one most easily made."

Serrano and Antonio found it difficult to see the matter in that cheerful light, and assured Sir Francis that they had not been commissioned by the archduke to treat for his own withdrawal but for the surrender of the town. Hereupon high words and fierce discussion very naturally arose, and at last, when a good deal of time had been spent in the sharp encounter of wits, Vere proposed an adjournment of the discussion until after supper; politely expressing the hope that the Spanish gentlemen would be his guests.

The conversation had been from the beginning in French, as Vere, although a master of the Spanish language, was desirous that the rest of the company present should understand everything said at the interview.

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The invitation to table was graciously accepted, and the Christmas eve passed off more merrily than the preceding night had done, so far as Vere's two guests were concerned. Several distinguished officers were present at the festive board: Captain Montesquieu de Roquette, Sir Horace Vere, Captains St. Hilaire, Meetkerke, De Ryck, and others among them. As it was strict fast for the Catholics that evening—while on the other hand the English, still reckoning according to the old style, would not keep Christmas until ten days later—the banquet consisted mainly of eggs and fish, and the like meagre articles, in compliment to the guests. It was, however, as well furnished as could be expected in a beleaguered town, out of whose harbour a winter gale had been for many weeks blowing and preventing all ingress. There was at least no lack of excellent Bordeaux wine; while the servants waiting upon the table did not fail to observe that Governor Serrano was not in all respects a model of the temperance usually characteristic of his race. They carefully counted and afterwards related with admiration, not unmingled with horror, that the veteran Spaniard drank fifty-two goblets of claret, and was emptying his glass as fast as filled, although by no means neglecting the beer, the quality of which he had tested the night before at the Half-moon. Yet there seemed to be no perceptible effect produced upon him, save perhaps that he grew a shade more grave and dignified with each succeeding draught. For while the banquet proceeded in this very genial manner business was by no means neglected; the negotiations for the surrender of the city being conducted on both sides with a fuddled solemnity very edifying for the attendants to contemplate.

Vere complained that the archduke was unreasonable, for he claimed nothing less from his antagonists than their all. The commissioners replied that all was no more than his own property. It certainly could not be thought unjust of him to demand his own, and all Flanders was his by legal donation from his Majesty of Spain. Vere replied that he had never studied jurisprudence, and was not versed at all in that—science, but he had always heard in England that possession was nine points of the law. Now it so happened that they, and not his Highness, were in possession of Ostend, and it would be unreasonable to expect them to make a present of it to any one. The besiegers, he urged, had gained much honour by their steady persistence amid so many dangers; difficulties, and losses;—but winter had come, the weather was very bad, not a step of progress had been made, and he was bold enough to express his opinion that it would be far more sensible on the part of his Highness, after such deeds of valour, to withdraw his diminished forces out of the freezing and pestilential swamps before Ostend and go into comfortable winter-quarters at Ghent or Bruges. Enough had been done for glory, and it must certainly now be manifest that he had no chance of taking the city.

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Serrano retorted that it was no secret to the besiegers that the garrison had dwindled to a handful; that it was quite impossible for them to defend their outer works any longer; that with the loss of the external boulevard the defence of the place would be impossible, and that, on the contrary, it was for the republicans to resign themselves to their fate. They, too, had done enough for glory, and had nothing for it but to retire into the centre of their ruined little nest, where they must burrow until the enemy should have leisure to entirely unearth them, which would be a piece of work very easily and rapidly accomplished.

This was called negotiation; and thus the winter's evening wore away, until the Spaniards; heavy with fatigue and wine, were without much difficulty persuaded to seek the couches prepared for them.

Next day the concourse of people around the city was Christmas, wonderful to behold. The rumour had spread through the, provinces, and was on the wing to all foreign countries, that Ostend had capitulated, and that the commissioners were at that moment arranging the details. The cardinal-archduke, in complete Milanese armour, with a splendid feather-bush waving from his casque and surrounded by his brilliant body-guard, galloped to and fro outside the entrenchments, expecting every moment a deputation to come forth, bearing the keys of the town. The Infanta too, magnificent in ruff and farthingale and brocaded petticoat, and attended by a cavalcade of ladies of honour in gorgeous attire, pranced impatiently about, awaiting the dramatic termination of a leaguer which was becoming wearisome to besieger and besieged. Not even on the famous second of July of the previous year, when that princess was pleasing herself with imaginations as to the deportment of Maurice of Nassau as a captive, had her soul been so full of anticipated triumph as on this Christmas morning.

Such a festive scene as was now presented in the neighbourhood of Ostend had not been exhibited for many a long year in Flanders. From the whole country side came the peasants and burghers, men, women, and children, in holiday attire. It was like a kermis or provincial fair. Three thousand people at least were roaming about in all direction, gaping with wonder at the fortifications of the besieging army, so soon to be superfluous, sliding, skating, waltzing on the ice, admiring jugglers, dancing bears, puppet shows and merry-go-rounds, singing, and carousing upon herrings, sausages, waffles, with mighty draughts of Flemish ale, manifesting their exuberant joy that the thorn was nearly extracted from the lion's paw, and awaiting with delight a blessed relief from that operation. Never was a merrier Christmas morning in Flanders. There should be an end now to the forays through the country of those red-coated English pikemen, those hard-riding, hard-drinking troopers of Germany and, Holland, with the French and Scotch arquebus men, and terrible Zeeland sailors who had for years swept out of Ostend, at any convenient opportunity, to harry the whole province. And great was the joy in Flanders.



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Meantime within the city a different scene was enacting. Those dignified Spaniards—governor Serrano and Don Matteo Antonio—having slept off their carouse, were prepared after breakfast next morning to resume the interrupted negotiations. But affairs were now to take an unexpected turn. In the night the wind had changed, and in the course of the forenoon three Dutch vessels of war were descried in the offing, and soon calmly sailed into the mouth of the Gullet. The news was at once brought to Vere's headquarters. That general's plans had been crowned with success even sooner than he expected. There was no further object in continuing the comedy of negotiation, for the ships now arriving seemed crowded with troops. Sir Francis accordingly threw off the mask, and assuring his guests with extreme politeness that it had given him great pleasure to make the acquaintance of such distinguished personages, he thanked them cordially for their visit, but regretted that it would be no longer in his power to entertain any propositions of a pacific nature. The necessary reinforcements, which he had been so long expecting, had at last reached him, and it would not yet be necessary for him to retire into his ruined nest. Military honour therefore would not allow him to detain them any longer. Should he ever be so hard pressed again he felt sure that so magnanimous a prince as his Highness would extend to him all due clemency and consideration.

The Spaniards; digesting as they best could the sauce of contumely with which the gross treachery of the transaction was now seasoned, solemnly withdrew, disdainingly to express their spleen in words of idle menace.

They were escorted back through the lines, and at once made their report at headquarters. The festival had been dismally interrupted before it was well begun. The vessels were soon observed by friend and foe making their way triumphantly up to the town where they soon dropped anchor at the wharf of the inner Gullet, having only a couple of sailors wounded, despite all the furious discharges of Bucquoy's batteries. The holiday makers dispersed, much discomfited, the English hostages returned to the town, and the archduke shut himself up, growling and furious. His generals and counsellors, who had recommended the abandonment of his carefully prepared assault, and acceptance of the perfidious propositions to negotiate, by which so much golden time had been squandered, were for several days excluded from his presence.

Meantime the army, disappointed, discontented, half-starved, unpaid, passed their days and nights as before, in the sloppy trenches, while deep and earnest were the complaints and the curses which succeeded to the momentary exultation of Christmas eve. The soldiers were more than ever embittered against their august commander-in-chief, for they had just enjoyed a signal opportunity of comparing the luxury and comfortable magnificence

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of his Highness and the Infanta, and of contrasting it with their own misery. Moreover, it had long been exciting much indignation in the ranks that veteran generals and colonels, in whom all men had confidence, had been in great numbers superseded in order to make place for court favourites, utterly without experience or talent. Thus the veterans; murmuring in the wet trenches. The archduke meanwhile, in his sullen retirement, brooded over a tragedy to follow the very successful comedy of his antagonist.

It was not long delayed. The assault which had been postponed in the latter days of December was to be renewed before the end of the first week of the new year. Vere, through scouts and deserters, was aware of the impending storm, and had made his arrangements in accordance with, the very minute information which he had thus received. The reinforcements, so opportunely sent by the States, were not numerous—only six hundred in all—but they were an earnest of fresh comrades to follow. Meantime they sufficed to fill the gaps in the ranks, and to enable Vere to keep possession of the external line of fortifications, including the all-important Porcupine. Moreover, during the fictitious negotiations, while the general had thus been holding—as he expressed it—the wolf by both ears, the labor of repairing damages in dyke, moat, and wall had not been for an instant neglected.

The morning of the 7th January, 1602, opened with a vigorous cannonade from all the archduke's batteries, east, west, and south. Auditor Fleeting, counsellor and secretary of the city, aide-de-camp and right hand of the commander-in-chief, a grim, grizzled, leathern-faced man of fifty, steady under fire as a veteran arquebuseer, ready with his pen as a counting-house clerk, and as fertile in resource as the most experienced campaigner, was ever at the general's side. At his suggestion several houses had been demolished, to furnish materials in wood and iron to stop the gaps as soon as made. Especially about the Sand Hill fort and the Porcupine a plentiful supply was collected, no time having been lost in throwing up stockades, palisades, and every other possible obstruction to the expected assailants. Knowing perfectly well where the brunt of the battle was to be, Vere had placed his brother Sir Horace at the head of twelve picked companies of diverse nations in the Sand Hill. Four of the very best companies of the garrison were stationed in the Porcupine, and ten more of the choicest in Fort Hell's Mouth, under Colonel Meetkerke. It must be recollected that the first of these three works was the key to the fortifications of the old or outer town. The other two were very near it, and were the principal redoubts which defended the most exposed and vulnerable portion of the new town on the western side. The Sand Hill, as its name imported, was the only existing relic within the city's verge of the chain of downs once encircling the whole place. It had however been cannonaded so steadily during the six months' siege as to have become almost ironclad—a mass of metal gradually accumulating from the enemy's guns. With the curtain extending from it towards east

and west it protected the old town quite up to the little ancient brick church, one of the only two in Ostend.



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All day long the cannon thundered—a bombardment such as had never before been dreamed of in those days, two thousand shots having been distinctly counted, by the burghers. There was but languid response from the besieged, who were reserving their strength. At last, to the brief winter's day succeeded a pitch-dark evening. It was dead low tide at seven. At that hour the drums suddenly beat alarm along the whole line of fortifications from the Gullet on the east to the old harbour on the west, while through the mirky atmosphere sounded the trumpets of the assault, the shouts of the Spanish and Italian commanders, and the fierce responsive yells of their troops. Sir Francis, having visited every portion of the works, and satisfied himself that every man in the garrison was under arms, and that all his arrangements had been fulfilled, now sat on horseback, motionless as a statue, within the Sand Hill. Among the many serious and fictitious attacks now making he waited calmly for the one great assault, even allowing some of the enemy to scale the distant counterscarp of the external works towards the south, which he had by design left insufficiently guarded. It was but a brief suspense, for in a few moments two thousand men had rushed through the bed of the old harbour, out of which the tide had ebbed, and were vigorously assailing the Sand Hill and the whole length of its curtain. The impenetrable darkness made it impossible to count, but the noise and the surging fury of the advance rendered it obvious that the critical moment had arrived. Suddenly a vivid illumination burst forth. Great pine torches, piles of tar-barrels, and heaps of other inflammable material, which had been carefully arranged in Fort Porcupine, were now all at once lighted by Vere's command.

As the lurid blaze flashed far and wide there started out of the gloom not only the long lines of yellow jerkined pikemen and arquebuseers, with their storm-hoods and scaling ladders, rushing swiftly towards the forts, but beyond the broken sea dyke the reserved masses supporting the attack, drawn up in solid clumps of spears, with their gay standards waving above them, and with a strong force of cavalry in iron corslet and morion stationed in the rear to urge on the infantry and prevent their faltering in the night's work, became visible—phantom-like but perfectly distinct.

At least four thousand men were engaged in this chief attack, and the light now permitted the besieged to direct their fire from cannon, demi-cannon, culverin, and snaphance, with fatal effect. The assailants, thinned, straggling, but undismayed, closed up their ranks, and still came fiercely on. Never had Spaniards, Walloons, and Italians, manifested greater contempt of death than on this occasion. They knew that the archduke and the infanta were waiting breathlessly in Fort St. Albert for the news of that victory of which the feigned negotiations had defrauded them at Christmas, and they felt perfectly confident



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of ending both the siege and the forty years' war this January night. But they had reckoned without their wily English host. As they came nearer—van, and at last reserve—they dropped in great heaps under the steady fire of the musketry—as Philip Flaming, looking on, exclaimed—like apples when the autumn wind blows through the orchard. And as the foremost still pressed nearer and nearer, striving to clamber up the shattered counterscarp and through every practicable breach, the English, Hollanders, and Zeelanders, met them in the gap, not only at push of pike, but with their long daggers and with flaming pitchhoops, and hurled them down to instant death.

And thus around the Sand Hill, the Porcupine, and Hell's Mouth, the battle raged nearly two hours long, without an inch of ground being gained by the assailants. The dead and dying were piled beneath the walls, while still the reserves, goaded up to the mark by the cavalry, mounted upon the bodies of their fallen comrades and strove to plant their ladders. But now the tide was on the flood, the harbour was filling, and cool Auditor Fleming, whom nothing escaped quietly asked the general's permission to open the western' sluice. It was obvious, he observed, that the fury of the attack was over, and that the enemy would soon be effecting a retreat before the water should have risen too high. He even pointed out many stragglers attempting to escape through the already deepening shallows. Vere's consent was at once given, the flood-gate was opened, and the assailants such as still survived—panic-struck in a moment, rushed wildly back through the old harbour towards their camp. It was too late. The waters were out, and the contending currents whirled the fugitives up and down through the submerged land, and beyond the broken dyke, until great numbers of them were miserably drowned in the haven, while others were washed out to sea. Horses and riders were borne off towards the Zealand coast, and several of their corpses were picked up days afterwards in the neighbourhood of Flushing.

Meantime those who had effected a lodgment in the Polder, the Square, and the other southern forts, found, after the chief assault had failed, that they had gained nothing by their temporary triumph but the certainty of being butchered. Retreat was impossible, and no quarter was given. Count Imbec, a noble of great wealth, offered his weight in gold for his ransom, but was killed by a private soldier, who preferred his blood, or doubted his solvency. Durango, marshal of the camp, Don Alvarez de Suarez, and Don Matteo Antonio, sergeant-major and quarter-master-general, whose adventures as a hostage within the town on Christmas eve have so recently been related, were also slain.



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On the eastern side Bucquoy's attack was an entire failure. His arrangements were too slowly made, and before he could bring his men to the assault the water was so high in the Gullet that they refused to lay their pontoons and march to certain death. Only at lowest ebb, and with most exquisite skill in fording, would it have been possible to effect anything like an earnest demonstration or a surprise. Moreover some of the garrison, giving themselves out as deserters, stole out of the Spanish Half-moon, which had been purposely almost denuded of its defenders, towards the enemy's entrenchments, and offered to lead a body of Spaniards into that ravelin. Bucquoy fell into the trap, so that the detachment, after a victory as easily effected as that in the southern forts, found themselves when the fight was over not the captors but the caught. A few attempted to escape and were driven into the sea; the rest were massacred.

Fifteen hundred of the enemy's dead were counted and registered by Auditor Fleming. The whole number of the slain and drowned was reckoned as high as two thousand, which was at least, a quarter of the whole besieging army. And so ended this winter night's assault, by which the archduke had fondly hoped to avenge himself for Vere's perfidy, and to terminate the war at a blow. Only sixty of the garrison were killed, and Sir Horace Vere was wounded.

The winter now set in with severe sleet, and snow, and rain, and furious tempests lashing the sea over the works of besieger and besieged, and for weeks together paralyzing all efforts of either army. Eight weary months the siege had lasted; the men in town and hostile camp, exposed to the inclemency of the wintry trenches, sinking faster before the pestilence which now swept impartially through all ranks than the soldiers of the archduke had fallen at Nieuport, or in the recent assault on the Sand Hill. Of seven thousand hardly three thousand now remained in the garrison.

Yet still the weary sausage making and wooden castle building went on along the Gullet and around the old town. The Bredene dyke crept on inch by inch, but the steady ships of the republic came and went unharmed by the batteries with which Bucquoy hoped to shut up the New Harbour. The archduke's works were pushed up nearer on the west, but, as yet, not one practical advantage had been gained, and the siege had scarcely advanced a hair's breadth since the 5th of July of the preceding year, when the armies had first sat down before the place.

The stormy month of March had come, and Vere, being called to service in the field for the coming season, transferred the command at Ostend to Frederic van Dorp, a rugged, hard-headed, ill-favoured, stout-hearted Zealand colonel, with the face of a bull-dog, and with the tenacious grip of one.



ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Constitute themselves at once universal legatees
Crimes and cruelties such as Christians only could imagine
Human fat esteemed the sovereignst remedy (for wounds)
War was the normal and natural condition of mankind

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