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***HISTORY
OF THE UNITED
NETHERLANDS,
1590-99 -
COMPLETE***

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History of the United Netherlands, 1590-99 — Complete

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CHAPTER XXI.

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Effect of the Assassination of Henry III.—Concentration of forces for the invasion of France—The Netherlands determine on striking a blow for freedom—Organization of a Dutch army—Stratagem to surprise the castle of Breda—Intrepidity and success of the enterprise.

The dagger of Jacques Clement had done much, and was likely to do more, to change the face of Europe. Another proof was afforded that assassination had become a regular and recognised factor in the political problems of the sixteenth century. Another illustration was exhibited of the importance of the individual—even although that individual was in himself utterly despicable—to the working out of great historical results. It seemed that the murder of Henry III.—that forlorn caricature of kingship and of manhood—was likely to prove eminently beneficial to the cause of the Netherland commonwealth. Five years earlier, the murder of William the Silent had seemed to threaten its very existence.

For Philip the Prudent, now that France was deprived of a head, conceived that the time had arrived when he might himself assume the sovereignty of that kingdom. While a thing of straw, under the name of Charles X. and shape of a Cardinal Bourbon, was set up to do battle with that living sovereign and soldier, the heretic Bearnese, the Duke of Parma was privately ordered to bend all his energies towards the conquest of the realm in dispute, under pretence of assisting the Holy League.

Accordingly, early in the year 1590, Alexander concentrated a considerable force on the French frontier in Artois and Hainault, apparently threatening Bergen-op-Zoom and other cities in South Holland, but in reality preparing to invade France. The Duke of Mayenne, who had assumed the

title of lieutenant-general of that kingdom, had already visited him at Brussels in order to arrange the plan of the campaign.

While these measures were in preparation, an opportunity was likely to be afforded to the Netherlanders of striking a blow or two for liberty and independence; now that all the force that possibly could be spared was to be withdrawn by their oppressors and to be used for the subjugation of their neighbours. The question was whether there would be a statesman and a soldier ready to make use of this golden opportunity.

There was a statesman ripe and able who, since the death of the Taciturn, had been growing steadily in the estimation of his countrymen and who already was paramount in the councils of the States-General. There was a soldier, still very young, who was possessed of the strongest hereditary claims to the confidence and affection of the United Provinces and who had been passing a studious youth in making himself worthy of his father and his country. Fortunately, too, the statesman and the soldier were working most harmoniously together. John of Olden-Barneveld, with his great experience and vast and steady intellect, stood side by side with young Maurice of Nassau at this important crisis in the history of the new commonwealth.

At length the twig was becoming the tree—'tandem fit surculus arbor'—according to the device assumed by the son of William the Silent after his father's death.

The Netherlands had sore need of a practical soldier to contend with the scientific and professional tyrants against whom they had so long been struggling, and Maurice, although so young, was pre-eminently a practical man. He was no enthusiast; he was no poet. He was at that period certainly no politician. Not often at the age of twenty has a man devoted himself for years to pure mathematics for the

purpose of saving his country. Yet this was Maurice's scheme. Four years long and more, when most other youths in his position and at that epoch would have been alternating between frivolous pleasures and brilliant exploits in the field, the young prince had spent laborious days and nights with the learned Simon Stevinus of Bruges. The scientific work which they composed in common, the credit of which the master assigned to the pupil, might have been more justly attributed perhaps to the professor than to the prince, but it is certain that Maurice was an apt scholar.

In that country, ever held in existence by main human force against the elements, the arts of engineering, hydrostatics and kindred branches were of necessity much cultivated. It was reserved for the young mathematician to make them as potent against a human foe.

Moreover, there were symptoms that the military discipline, learning and practical skill, which had almost made Spain the mistress of the world, were sinking into decay. Farnese, although still in the prime of life, was broken in health, and there seemed no one fit to take the place of himself and his lieutenants when they should be removed from the scene where they had played their parts so consummately. The army of the Netherlands was still to be created. Thus far the contest had been mainly carried on by domestic militia and foreign volunteers or hirelings. The train-bands of the cities were aided in their struggles against Spanish pikemen and artillerists, Italian and Albanian cavalry by the German riders, whom every little potentate was anxious to sell to either combatant according to the highest bid, and by English mercenaries, whom the love of adventure or the hope of plunder sent forth under such well-seasoned captains as Williams and Morgan, Vere and the Norrises, Baskerville and Willoughby.

But a Dutch army there was none and Maurice had determined that at last a national force should be created.

In this enterprise he was aided and guided by his cousin Lewis William, Stadtholder of Friesland—the quaint, rugged little hero, young in years but almost a veteran in the wars of freedom, who was as genial and intellectual in council as he was reckless and impulsive in the field.

Lewis William had felt that the old military art was dying out and that—there was nothing to take its place. He was a diligent student of antiquity. He had revived in the swamps of Friesland the old manoeuvres, the quickness of wheeling, the strengthening, without breaking ranks or columns, by which the ancient Romans had performed so much excellent work in their day, and which seemed to have passed entirely into oblivion. Old colonels and rittmasters, who had never heard of Leo the Thracian nor the Macedonian phalanx, smiled and shrugged their shoulders, as they listened to the questions of the young count, or gazed with profound astonishment at the eccentric evolutions to which he was accustoming his troops. From the heights of superior wisdom they looked down with pity upon these innovations on the good old battle order. They were accustomed to great solid squares of troops wheeling in one way, steadily, deliberately, all together, by one impulse and as one man. It was true that in narrow fields, and when the enemy was pressing, such stately evolutions often became impossible or ensured defeat; but when the little Stadtholder drilled his soldiers in small bodies of various shapes, teaching them to turn, advance; retreat; wheel in a variety of ways, sometimes in considerable masses, sometimes man by man, sending the foremost suddenly to the rear, or bringing the hindmost ranks to the front, and began to attempt all this in narrow fields as well as in wide ones, and when the enemy was in sight, men stood aghast at his want of reverence, or laughed at him as a pedant. But there came a day when they did not laugh, neither friends nor enemies. Meantime the two cousins, who directed all the military

operations in the provinces, understood each other thoroughly and proceeded to perfect their new system, to be adopted at a later period by all civilized nations.

The regular army of the Netherlands was small in number at that moment—not more than twenty thousand foot with two thousand horse—but it was well disciplined, well equipped, and, what was of great importance, regularly paid. Old campaigners complained that in the halcyon days of paper enrolments, a captain could earn more out of his company than a colonel now received for his whole regiment. The days when a thousand men were paid for, with a couple of hundred in the field, were passing away for the United Provinces and existed only for Italians and Spaniards. While, therefore, mutiny on an organised and extensive scale seemed almost the normal condition of the unpaid legions of Philip, the little army of Maurice was becoming the model for Europe to imitate.

The United Provinces were as yet very far from being masters of their own territory. Many of their most important cities still held for the king. In Brabant, such towns as Breda with its many dependencies and Gertruydenberg; on the Waal, the strong and wealthy Nymegen which Martin Schenk had perished in attempting to surprise; on the Yssel, the thriving city of Zutphen, whose fort had been surrendered by the traitor York, and the stately Deventer, which had been placed in Philip's possession by the treachery of Sir William Stanley; on the borders of Drenthe, the almost impregnable Koevorden, key to the whole Zwollian country; and in the very heart of ancient Netherland, Groningen, capital of the province of the same name, which the treason of Renneberg had sold to the Spanish tyrant; all these flourishing cities and indispensable strongholds were garrisoned by foreign troops, making the idea of Dutch independence a delusion.

While Alexander of Parma, sorely against his will and in obedience to what, he deemed the insane suggestions of his master, was turning his back on the Netherlands in order to relieve Paris, now hard pressed by the Bearnese, an opportunity offered itself of making at least a beginning in the great enterprise of recovering these most valuable possessions.

The fair and pleasant city of Breda lies on the Merk, a slender stream, navigable for small vessels, which finds its way to the sea through the great canal of the Dintel. It had been the property of the Princes of Orange, Barons of Breda, and had passed with the other possessions of the family to the house of Chalons-Nassau. Henry of Nassau had, half a century before, adorned and strengthened it by a splendid palace-fortress which, surrounded by a deep and double moat, thoroughly commanded the town. A garrison of five companies of Italian infantry and one of cavalry lay in this castle, which was under the command of Edward Lanzavecchia, governor both of Breda and of the neighbouring Gertruydenberg.

Breda was an important strategical position. It was moreover the feudal superior of a large number of adjacent villages as well as of the cities Osterhout, Steenberg and Rosendaal. It was obviously not more desirable for Maurice of Nassau to recover his patrimonial city than it was for the States-General to drive the Spaniards from so important a position!

In the month of February, 1590, Maurice, being then at the castle of Voorn in Zeeland, received a secret visit from a boatman, Adrian van der Berg by name, who lived at the village of Leur, eight or ten miles from Breda, and who had long been in the habit of supplying the castle with turf. In the absence of woods and coal mines, the habitual fuel of the country was furnished by those vast relics of the antediluvian forests which abounded in the still partially

submerged soil. The skipper represented that his vessel had passed so often into and out of the castle as to be hardly liable to search by the guard on its entrance. He suggested a stratagem by which it might be possible to surprise the stronghold.

The prince approved of the scheme and immediately consulted with Barneveld. That statesman at once proposed, as a suitable man to carry out the daring venture, Captain Charles de Heraugiere, a nobleman of Cambray, who had been long in the service of the States, had distinguished himself at Sluys and on other occasions, but who had been implicated in Leicester's nefarious plot to gain possession of the city of Leyden a few years before. The Advocate expressed confidence that he would be grateful for so signal an opportunity of retrieving a somewhat damaged reputation. Heraugiere, who was with his company in Voorn at the moment, eagerly signified his desire to attempt the enterprise as soon as the matter was communicated to him; avowing the deepest devotion to the house of William the Silent and perfect willingness to sacrifice his life, if necessary, in its cause and that of the country. Philip Nassau, cousin of Prince Maurice and brother of Lewis William, governor of Gorcum, Dorcum, and Lowenstein Castle and colonel of a regiment of cavalry, was also taken into the secret, as well as Count Hohenlo, President Van der Myle and a few others; but a mystery was carefully spread and maintained over the undertaking.

Heraugiere selected sixty-eight men, on whose personal daring and patience he knew that he could rely, from the regiments of Philip Nassau and of Famars, governor of the neighbouring city of Heusden, and from his own company. Besides himself, the officers to command the party were captains Logier and Fervet, and lieutenant Matthew Held. The names of such devoted soldiers deserve to be

commemorated and are still freshly remembered by their countrymen.

On the 25th of February, Maurice and his staff went to Willemstad on the Isle of Klundert, it having been given out on his departure from the Hague that his destination was Dort. On the same night at about eleven o'clock, by the feeble light of a waning moon, Heraugiere and his band came to the Swertsenburg ferry, as agreed upon, to meet the boatman. They found neither him nor his vessel, and they wandered about half the night, very cold, very indignant, much perplexed. At last, on their way back, they came upon the skipper at the village of Terheyde, who made the extraordinary excuse that he had overslept himself and that he feared the plot had been discovered. It being too late to make any attempt that night, a meeting was arranged for the following evening. No suspicion of treachery occurred to any of the party, although it became obvious that the skipper had grown faint-hearted. He did not come on the next night to the appointed place but he sent two nephews, boatmen like himself, whom he described as dare-devils.

On Monday night, the 26th of February, the seventy went on board the vessel, which was apparently filled with blocks of turf, and packed themselves closely in the hold. They moved slowly during a little time on their perilous voyage; for the winter wind, thick with fog and sleet, blew directly down the river, bringing along with it huge blocks of ice and scooping the water out of the dangerous shallows, so as to render the vessel at any moment liable to be stranded. At last the navigation became impossible and they came to a standstill. From Monday night till Thursday morning those seventy Hollanders lay packed like herrings in the hold of their little vessel, suffering from hunger, thirst, and deadly cold; yet not one of them attempted to escape or murmured a wish to abandon the enterprise. Even when the third

morning dawned there was no better prospect of proceeding; for the remorseless east wind still blew a gale against them, and the shoals which beset their path had become more dangerous than ever. It was, however, absolutely necessary to recruit exhausted nature, unless the adventurers were to drop powerless on the threshold when they should at last arrive at their destination. In all secrecy they went ashore at a lonely castle called Nordam, where they remained to refresh themselves until about eleven at night, when one of the boatmen came to them with the intelligence that the wind had changed and was now blowing freshly in from the sea. Yet the voyage of a few leagues, on which they were embarked, lasted nearly two whole days longer. On Saturday afternoon they passed through the last sluice, and at about three o'clock the last boom was shut behind them. There was no retreat possible for them now. The seventy were to take the strong castle and city of Breda or to lay down their lives, every man of them. No quarter and short shrift—such was their certain destiny, should that half-crippled, half-frozen little band not succeed in their task before another sunrise.

They were now in the outer harbour and not far from the Watergate which led into the inner castle-haven. Presently an officer of the guard put off in a skiff and came on board the vessel. He held a little conversation with the two boatmen, observed that the castle was—much in want of full, took a survey of the turf with which the ship was apparently laden, and then lounged into the little cabin. Here he was only separated by a sliding trap-door from the interior of the vessel. Those inside could hear and see his every movement. Had there been a single cough or sneeze from within, the true character of the cargo, then making its way into the castle, would have been discovered and every man would within ten minutes have been butchered. But the officer, unsuspecting, soon took his departure, saying that

he would send some men to warp the vessel into the castle dock.

Meantime, as the adventurers were making their way slowly towards the Watergate, they struck upon a hidden obstruction in the river and the deeply laden vessel sprang a leak. In a few minutes those inside were sitting up to their knees in water—a circumstance which scarcely improved their already sufficiently dismal condition. The boatmen vigorously plied the pumps to save the vessel from sinking outright; a party of Italian soldiers soon arrived on the shore, and in the course of a couple of hours they had laboriously dragged the concealed Hollanders into the inner harbour and made their vessel fast, close to the guard-house of the castle.

And now a crowd of all sorts came on board. The winter nights had been long and fearfully cold, and there was almost a dearth of fuel both in town and fortress. A gang of labourers set to work discharging the turf from the vessel with such rapidity that the departing daylight began to shine in upon the prisoners much sooner than they wished. Moreover, the thorough wetting, to which after all their other inconveniences they had just been exposed in their narrow escape from foundering, had set the whole party sneezing and coughing. Never was a catarrh so sudden, so universal, or so ill-timed. Lieutenant Held, unable to control the violence of his cough, drew his dagger and eagerly implored his next neighbour to stab him to the heart, lest his infirmity should lead to the discovery of the whole party. But the calm and wary skipper who stood on the deck instantly commanded his companion to work at the pump with as much clatter as possible, assuring the persons present that the hold was nearly full of water. By this means the noise of the coughing was effectually drowned. Most thoroughly did the bold boatman deserve the title of dare-devil, bestowed by his more fainthearted uncle. Calmly

looking death in the face, he stood there quite at his ease, exchanging jokes with his old acquaintances, chaffering with the eager purchasers of peat shouting most noisy and superfluous orders to the one man who composed his crew, doing his utmost, in short, to get rid of his customers and to keep enough of the turf on board to conceal the conspirators.

At last, when the case seemed almost desperate, he loudly declared that sufficient had been unladen for that evening and that it was too dark and he too tired for further work. So, giving a handful of stivers among the workmen, he bade them go ashore at once and have some beer and come next morning for the rest of the cargo. Fortunately, they accepted his hospitable proposition and took their departure. Only the servant of the captain of the guard lingered behind, complaining that the turf was not as good as usual and that his master would never be satisfied with it.

"Ah!" returned the cool skipper, "the best part of the cargo is underneath. This is expressly reserved for the captain. He is sure to get enough of it to-morrow."

Thus admonished, the servant departed and the boatman was left to himself. His companion had gone on shore with secret orders to make the best of his way to Prince Maurice, to inform him of the arrival of the ship within the fortress, and of the important fact which they had just learned, that Governor Lanzavecchia, who had heard rumours of some projected enterprise and who suspected that the object aimed at was Gertruydenberg, had suddenly taken his departure for that city, leaving as his lieutenant his nephew Paolo, a raw lad quite incompetent to provide for the safety of Breda.

A little before midnight, Captain Heraugiere made a brief address to his comrades in the vessel, telling them that the hour for carrying out their undertaking had at length

arrived. Retreat was impossible, defeat was certain death, only in complete victory lay their own safety and a great advantage for the commonwealth. It was an honor to them to be selected for such an enterprise. To show cowardice now would be an eternal shame for them, and he would be the man to strike dead with his own hand any traitor or poltroon. But if, as he doubted not, every one was prepared to do his duty, their success was assured, and he was himself ready to take the lead in confronting every danger.

He then divided the little band into two companies, one under himself to attack the main guard-house, the other under Fervet to seize the arsenal of the fortress.

Noiselessly they stole out of the ship where they had so long been confined, and stood at last on the ground within the precincts of the castle. Heraugiere marched straight to the guard-house.

"Who goes there?" cried a sentinel, hearing some movement in the darkness.

"A friend," replied the captain, seizing him, by the throat, and commanding him, if he valued his life, to keep silence except when addressed and then to speak in a whisper.

"How many are there in the garrison?" muttered Heraugiere.

"Three hundred and fifty," whispered the sentinel.

"How many?" eagerly demanded the nearest followers, not hearing the reply.

"He says there are but fifty of them," said Heraugiere, prudently suppressing the three hundred, in order to encourage his comrades.

Quietly as they had made their approach, there was nevertheless a stir in the guard-house. The captain of the watch sprang into the courtyard.

"Who goes there?" he demanded in his turn.

"A friend," again replied Heraugiere, striking him dead with a single blow as he spoke.

Others emerged with torches. Heraugiere was slightly wounded, but succeeded, after a brief struggle, in killing a second assailant. His followers set upon the watch who retreated into the guard-house. Heraugiere commanded his men to fire through the doors and windows, and in a few minutes every one of the enemy lay dead.

It was not a moment for making prisoners or speaking of quarter. Meantime Fervet and his band had not been idle. The magazine-house of the castle was seized, its defenders slain. Young Lanzavecchia made a sally from the palace, was wounded and driven back together with a few of his adherents.

The rest of the garrison fled helter-skelter into the town. Never had the musketeers of Italy—for they all belonged to Spinola's famous Sicilian Legion—behaved so badly. They did not even take the precaution to destroy the bridge between the castle and the town as they fled panic-stricken before seventy Hollanders. Instead of encouraging the burghers to their support they spread dismay, as they ran, through every street.

Young Lanzavecchia, penned into a corner of the castle; began to parley; hoping for a rally before a surrender should be necessary. In the midst of the negotiation and a couple of hours before dawn, Hohenlo; duly apprised by the boatman, arrived with the vanguard of Maurice's troops before the field-gate of the fort. A vain attempt was made to force this portal open, but the winter's ice had fixed it fast. Hohenlo was obliged to batter down the palisade near the water-gate and enter by the same road through which the fatal turf-boat had passed.

Soon after he had marched into the town at the head of a strong detachment, Prince Maurice himself arrived in great

haste, attended by Philip Nassau, the Admiral Justinus Nassau, Count Solms, Peter van der Does, and Sir Francis Vere, and followed by another body of picked troops; the musicians playing merrily that national air, then as now so dear to Netherlanders—

"Wilhelmus van Nassouwen
Ben ick van Duytaem bloed."

The fight was over. Some forty of the garrison had been killed, but not a man of the attacking party. The burgomaster sent a trumpet to the prince asking permission to come to the castle to arrange a capitulation; and before sunrise, the city and fortress of Breda had surrendered to the authority of the States-General and of his Excellency.

The terms were moderate. The plundering was commuted for the payment of two months' wages to every soldier engaged in the affair. Burghers who might prefer to leave the city were allowed to do so with protection to life, and property. Those who were willing to remain loyal citizens were not to be molested, in their consciences or their households, in regard to religion. The public exercise of Catholic rites was however suspended until the States-General should make some universal provision on this subject.

Subsequently, it must be allowed, the bargain of commutation proved a bad one for the burghers. Seventy men had in reality done the whole work, but so many soldiers, belonging to the detachments who marched in after the fortress had been taken, came forward to claim their months' wages as to bring the whole amount required above one hundred thousand florins. The Spaniards accordingly reproached Prince Maurice with having fined his own patrimonial city more heavily than Alexander Farnese had mulcted Antwerp, which had been made to pay but four hundred thousand florins, a far less sum in proportion to the wealth and importance of the place.

Already the Prince of Parma, in the taking of Breda, saw verified his predictions of the disasters about to fall on the Spanish interests in the Netherlands, by reason of Philip's obstinate determination to concentrate all his energies on the invasion of France. Alexander had been unable, in the midst of preparations for his French campaign, to arrest this sudden capture, but his Italian blood was on fire at the ignominy which had come upon the soldiery of his countrymen. Five companies of foot and one of horse-picked troops of Spain and Italy—had surrendered a wealthy, populous town and a well-fortified castle to a mud-scow, and had fled shrieking in dismay from the onset of seventy frost-bitten Hollanders.

It was too late to save the town, but he could punish, as it deserved, the pusillanimity of the garrison.

Three captains—one of them rejoicing in the martial name of Cesar Guerra—were publicly beheaded in Brussels. A fourth, Ventimiglia, was degraded but allowed to escape with life, on account of his near relationship to the Duke of Terranova, while Governor Lanzavecchia was obliged to resign the command of Gertruydenberg. The great commander knew better than to encourage the yielding up of cities and fortresses by a mistaken lenity to their unlucky defenders.

Prince Maurice sent off letters the same night announcing his success to the States-General. Hohenlo wrote pithily to Olden-Barneveld—"The castle and town of Breda are ours, without a single man dead on our side. The garrison made no resistance but ran distracted out of the town."

The church bells rang and bonfires blazed and cannon thundered in every city in the United Provinces to commemorate this auspicious event. Olden-Barneveld, too, whose part in arranging the scheme was known to have been so valuable, received from the States-General a magnificent gilded vase with sculptured representations of

the various scenes in the drama, and it is probable that not more unmingled satisfaction had been caused by any one event of the war than by this surprise of Breda.

The capture of a single town, not of first-rate importance either, would hardly seem too merit so minute a description as has been given in the preceding pages. But the event, with all its details, has been preserved with singular vividness in Netherland story. As an example of daring, patience, and complete success, it has served to encourage the bold spirits of every generation and will always inspire emulation in patriotic hearts of every age and clime, while, as the first of a series of audacious enterprises by which Dutch victories were to take the place of a long procession of Spanish triumphs on the blood-stained soil of the provinces, it merits, from its chronological position, a more than ordinary attention.

In the course of the summer Prince Maurice, carrying out into practice the lessons which he had so steadily been pondering, reduced the towns and strong places of Heyl, Flemert, Elshout, Crevecoeur, Hayden, Steenberg, Rosendaal, and Osterhout. But his time, during the remainder of the year 1590, was occupied with preparations for a campaign on an extended scale and with certain foreign negotiations to which it will soon be necessary to direct the reader's attention.

CHAPTER XXII.

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Struggle of the United Provinces against Philip of Spain—Progress of the Republic—Influence of Geographical position on the fate of the Netherlands—Contrast offered by America—Miserable state of the so-called "obedient" provinces—Prosperity of the Commonwealth—Its internal government—Tendency to provincialism—Quibbles of the English Members of the Council, Wilkes and Bodley—Exclusion of Olden-Barneveld from the State Council—Proposals of Philip for mediation with the United Provinces—The Provinces resolutely decline all proffers of intervention.

The United Provinces had now been engaged in unbroken civil war for a quarter of a century. It is, however, inaccurate to designate this great struggle with tyranny as a civil war. It was a war for independence, maintained by almost the whole population of the United Provinces against a foreigner, a despot, alien to their blood, ignorant of their language, a hater of their race, a scorner of their religion, a trampler upon their liberties, their laws, and institutions—a man who had publicly declared that he would rather the whole nation were exterminated than permitted to escape from subjection to the Church of Rome. Liberty of speech, liberty of the press, liberty of thought on political, religious, and social questions existed within those Dutch pastures and Frisian swamps to a far greater degree than in any other part of the world at that day; than in very many regions of Christendom in our own time. Personal slavery was unknown. In a large portion of their territory it had never existed. The free Frisians, nearest blood-relations of, in this respect, the less favoured Anglo-Saxons, had never bowed the knee to the feudal system, nor worn nor caused to be worn the collar of the serf. In the battles for human liberty no nation has stood with cleaner hands before the great tribunal, nor offered more spotless examples of patriotism to be emulated in all succeeding ages, than the Netherlanders in their gigantic struggle with Philip of Spain.

It was not a class struggling for their own privileges, but trampling on their fellow-men in a lower scale of humanity. Kings and aristocrats sneered at the vulgar republic where Hans Miller, Hans Baker, and Hans Brewer enjoyed political rights and prated of a sovereignty other than that of long-descended races and of anointed heads. Yet the pikemen of Spain and the splendid cavalry and musketeers of Italy and Burgundy, who were now beginning to show their backs both behind entrenchments and in the open field to their republican foes, could not deny the valour with which the battles of liberty were fought; while Elizabeth of England, maintainer, if such ever were, of hereditary sovereignty and hater of popular freedom, acknowledged that for wisdom in council, dignity and adroitness in diplomatic debate, there were none to surpass the plain burgher statesmen of the new republic.

And at least these Netherlanders were consistent with themselves. They had come to disbelieve in the mystery of kingcraft, in the divine speciality of a few transitory mortals to direct the world's events and to dictate laws to their fellow-creatures. What they achieved was for the common good of all. They chose to live in an atmosphere of blood and fire for generation after generation rather than flinch from their struggle with despotism, for they knew that, cruel as the sea, it would swallow them all at last in one common destruction if they faltered or paused. They fought for the liberty of all. And it is for this reason that the history of this great conflict deserved to be deeply pondered by those who have the instinct of human freedom. Had the Hollanders basely sunk before the power of Spain, the proud history of England, France, and Germany would have been written in far different terms. The blood and tears which the Netherlanders caused to flow in their own stormy days have turned to blessings for remotest climes and ages. A pusillanimous peace, always possible at any period of their

war, would have been hailed with rapture by contemporary statesmen, whose names have vanished from the world's memory; but would have sown with curses and misery the soil of Europe for succeeding ages. The territory of the Netherlands is narrow and meagre. It is but a slender kingdom now among the powers of the earth. The political grandeur of nations is determined by physical causes almost as much as by moral ones. Had the cataclysm which separated the fortunate British islands from the mainland happened to occur, instead, at a neighbouring point of the earth's crust; had the Belgian, Dutch, German and Danish Netherland floated off as one island into the sea, while that famous channel between two great rival nations remained dry land, there would have been a different history of the world.

But in the 16th century the history of one country was not an isolated chapter of personages and events. The history of the Netherlands is history of liberty. It was now combined with the English, now with French, with German struggles for political and religious freedom, but it is impossible to separate it from the one great complex which makes up the last half of the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries.

At that day the Netherland republic was already becoming a power of importance in the political family of Christendom. If, in spite of her geographical disadvantages, she achieved so much, how much vaster might her power have grown, how much stronger through her example might popular institutions throughout the world have become, and how much more pacific the relations of European tribes, had nature been less niggard in her gifts to the young commonwealth. On the sea she was strong, for the ocean is the best of frontiers; but on land her natural boundaries faded vaguely away, without strong physical demarcations and with no sharply defined limits of tongue, history or race.

Accident or human caprice seemed to have divided German Highland from German Netherland; Belgic Gaul from the rest of the Gallic realm. And even from the slender body, which an arbitrary destiny had set off for centuries into a separate organism, tyranny and religious bigotry had just hewn another portion away. But the commonwealth was already too highly vitalized to permit peaceful dismemberment. Only the low organisms can live in all their parts after violent separations. The trunk remained, bleeding but alive and vigorous, while the amputated portion lay for centuries in fossilized impotence.

Never more plainly than in the history of this commonwealth was the geographical law manifested by which the fate of nations is so deeply influenced. Courage, enterprise amounting almost to audacity, and a determined will confronted for a long lapse of time the inexorable, and permitted a great empire to germinate out of a few sand-banks held in defiance of the ocean, and protected from human encroachments on the interior only by the artificial barrier of custom-house and fort.

Thus foredoomed at birth, it must increase our admiration of human energy and of the sustaining influence of municipal liberty that the republic, even if transitory, should yet have girdled the earth with its possessions and held for a considerable period so vast a portion of the world in fee.

What a lesson to our transatlantic commonwealth, whom bountiful nature had blessed at her birth beyond all the nations of history and seemed to speed upon an unlimited career of freedom and peaceful prosperity, should she be capable at the first alarm on her track to throw away her inestimable advantages! If all history is not a mockery and a fable, she may be sure that the nation which deliberately carves itself in pieces and, substitutes artificial boundaries for the natural and historic ones, condemns itself either to extinction or to the lower life of political insignificance and

petty warfare, with the certain loss of liberty and national independence at last. Better a terrible struggle, better the sacrifice of prosperity and happiness for years, than the eternal setting of that great popular hope, the United American Republic.

I speak in this digression only of the relations of physical nature to liberty and nationality, making no allusion to the equally stringent moral laws which no people can violate and yet remain in health and vigour.

Despite a quarter of a century of what is commonly termed civil war, the United Netherlands were prosperous and full of life. It was in the provinces which had seceded from the union of Utrecht that there was silence as of the grave, destitution, slavery, abject submission to a foreign foe. The leaders in the movement which had brought about the scission of 1579—commonly called the 'Reconciliation'—enjoyed military and civil posts under a foreign tyrant, but were poorly rewarded for subserviency in fighting against their own brethren by contumely on the part of their masters. As for the mass of the people it would be difficult to find a desolation more complete than that recorded of the "obedient" provinces. Even as six years before, wolves littered their whelps in deserted farmhouses, cane-brake and thicket usurped the place of cornfield and, orchard, robbers swarmed on the highways once thronged by a most thriving population, nobles begged their bread in the streets of cities whose merchants once entertained emperors and whose wealth and traffic were the wonder of the world, while the Spanish viceroy formally permitted the land in the agricultural districts to be occupied and farmed by the first comer for his own benefit, until the vanished proprietors of the soil should make their re-appearance.

"Administered without justice or policy," said a Netherlander who was intensely loyal to the king and a most uncompromising Catholic, "eaten up and abandoned for that

purpose to the arbitrary will of foreigners who suck the substance and marrow of the land without benefit to the king, gnaw the obedient cities to the bones, and plunder the open defenceless country at their pleasure, it may be imagined how much satisfaction these provinces take in their condition. Commerce and trade have ceased in a country which traffic alone has peopled, for without it no human habitation could be more miserable and poor than our land."—[Discours du Seigneur de Champagny sur les affaires des Pays Bas, 21 Dec. 1589. Bibl. de Bourgogne, MS. No. 12,962.]

Nothing could be more gloomy than the evils thus described by the Netherland statesman and soldier, except the remedy which he suggested. The obedient provinces, thus scourged and blasted for their obedience, were not advised to improve their condition by joining hands with their sister States, who had just constituted themselves by their noble resistance to royal and ecclesiastical tyranny into a free and powerful commonwealth. On the contrary, two great sources of regeneration and prosperity were indicated, but very different ones from those in which the republic had sought and found her strength. In the first place, it was suggested as indispensable that the obedient provinces should have more Jesuits and more Friars. The mendicant orders should be summoned to renewed exertions, and the king should be requested to send seminary priests to every village in numbers proportionate to the population, who should go about from house to house, counting the children, and seeing that they learned their catechism if their parents did not teach them, and, even in case they did, examining whether it was done thoroughly and without deception.

In the second place it was laid down as important that the bishops should confirm no one who had not been sufficiently catechized. "And if the mendicant orders," said Champagny,

"are not numerous enough for these catechizations, the Jesuits might charge themselves therewith, not more and not less than the said mendicants, some of each being deputed to each parish. To this end it would be well if his Majesty should obtain from the Pope a command to the Jesuits to this effect, since otherwise they might not be willing to comply. It should also be ordered that all Jesuits, natives of these provinces, should return hither, instead of wandering about in other regions as if their help were not so necessary here."—[Ibid.]

It was also recommended that the mendicant friars should turn their particular attention to Antwerp, and that one of them should preach in French, another in German, another in English, every day at the opening of the Exchange.

With these appliances it was thought that Antwerp would revive out of its ruins and, despite the blockade of its river, renew its ancient commercial glories. Founded on the substantial rocks of mendicancy and jesuitism, it might again triumph over its rapidly rising rival, the heretic Amsterdam, which had no better basis for its grandeur than religious and political liberty, and uncontrolled access to the ocean.

Such were the aspirations of a distinguished and loyal Netherlander for the regeneration of his country. Such were his opinions as to the true sources of the wealth and greatness of nations. Can we wonder that the country fell to decay, or that this experienced, statesman and brave soldier should himself, after not many years, seek to hide his dishonoured head under the cowl of a monk?

The coast of the obedient provinces was thoroughly blockaded. The United Provinces commanded the sea, their cruisers, large and small, keeping diligent watch off every port and estuary of the Flemish coast, so that not a herringboat could enter without their permission. Antwerp, when it fell into the hands of the Spaniard, sank for ever

from its proud position. The city which Venetians but lately had confessed with a sigh to be superior in commercial grandeur to their own magnificent capital, had ceased to be a seaport. Shut in from the ocean by Flushing—firmly held by an English garrison as one of the cautionary towns for the Queen's loan—her world-wide commerce withered before men's eyes. Her population was dwindling to not much more than half its former numbers, while Ghent, Bruges, and other cities were diminished by two-thirds.

On the other hand, the commerce and manufactures of the United Republic had enormously augmented. Its bitterest enemies bore witness to the sagacity and success by which its political affairs were administered, and to its vast superiority in this respect over the obedient provinces. "The rebels are not ignorant of our condition," said Champagny, "they are themselves governed with consummate wisdom, and they mock at those who submit themselves to the Duke of Parma. They are the more confirmed in their rebellion, when they see how many are thronging from us to them, complaining of such bad government, and that all take refuge in flight who can from the misery and famine which it has caused throughout these provinces!" The industrial population had flowed from the southern provinces into the north, in obedience to an irresistible law. The workers in iron, paper, silk, linen, lace, the makers of brocade, tapestry, and satin, as well as of all the coarser fabrics, had fled from the land of oppression to the land of liberty. Never in the history of civilisation had there been a more rapid development of human industry than in Holland during these years of bloodiest warfare. The towns were filled to overflowing. Amsterdam multiplied in wealth and population as fast as Antwerp shrank. Almost as much might be said of Middelburg, Enkhuyzen, Horn, and many other cities. It is the epoch to which the greatest expansion of municipal architecture is traced. Warehouses,

palaces, docks, arsenals, fortifications, dykes, splendid streets and suburbs, were constructed on every side, and still there was not room for the constantly increasing population, large numbers of which habitually dwelt in the shipping. For even of that narrow span of earth called the province of Holland, one-third was then interior water, divided into five considerable lakes, those of Harlem, Schermer, Beemster, Waert, and Purmer. The sea was kept out by a magnificent system of dykes under the daily superintendence of a board of officers, called dyke-graves, while the rain-water, which might otherwise have drowned the soil thus painfully reclaimed, was pumped up by windmills and drained off through sluices opening and closing with the movement of the tides.

The province of Zeeland was one vast "polder." It was encircled by an outer dyke of forty Dutch equal to one hundred and fifty English, miles in extent, and traversed by many interior barriers. The average cost of dyke-building was sixty florins the rod of twelve feet, or 84,000 florins the Dutch mile. The total cost of the Zeeland dykes was estimated at 3,360,000 florins, besides the annual repairs.

But it was on the sea that the Netherlanders were really at home, and they always felt it in their power—as their last resource against foreign tyranny—to bury their land for ever in the ocean, and to seek a new country at the ends of the earth. It has always been difficult to doom to political or personal slavery a nation accustomed to maritime pursuits. Familiarity with the boundless expanse of ocean, and the habit of victoriously contending with the elements in their stormy strength, would seem to inspire a consciousness in mankind of human dignity and worth. With the exception of Spain, the chief seafaring nations of the world were already protestant. The counter-league, which was to do battle so strenuously with the Holy Confederacy, was essentially a maritime league. "All the maritime heretics of the world,

since heresy is best suited to navigators, will be banded together," said Champagny, "and then woe to the Spanish Indies, which England and Holland are already threatening."

The Netherlanders had been noted from earliest times for a free-spoken and independent personal demeanour. At this epoch they were taking the lead of the whole world in marine adventure. At least three thousand vessels of between one hundred and four hundred tons, besides innumerable doggers, busses, cromstevens, and similar craft used on the rivers and in fisheries, were to be found in the United Provinces, and one thousand, it was estimated, were annually built.

They traded to the Baltic regions for honey, wax, tallow, lumber, iron, turpentine, hemp. They brought from farthest Indies and from America all the fabrics of ancient civilisation, all the newly discovered products of a virgin soil, and dispensed them among the less industrious nations of the earth. Enterprise, led on and accompanied by science, was already planning the boldest flights into the unknown yet made by mankind, and it will soon be necessary to direct attention to those famous arctic voyages, made by Hollanders in pursuit of the north-west passage to Cathay, in which as much heroism, audacity, and scientific intelligence were displayed as in later times have made so many men belonging to both branches of the Anglo-Saxon race illustrious. A people, engaged in perennial conflict with a martial and sacerdotal despotism the most powerful in the world, could yet spare enough from its superfluous energies to confront the dangers of the polar oceans, and to bring back treasures of science to enrich the world.

Such was the spirit of freedom. Inspired by its blessed influence this vigorous and inventive little commonwealth triumphed over all human, all physical obstacles in its path. It organised armies on new principles to drive the most famous legions of history from its soil. It built navies to help