FRIEDRICH VON SCHILLER

HISTORY OF THE REVOLT OF THE NETHERLANDS — VOLUME 04

Friedrich Schiller

History of the Revolt of the Netherlands — Volume 04

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Содержание

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BOOK IV

THE ICONOCLASTS

The springs of this extraordinary occurrence are plainly not to be sought for so far back as many historians affect to trace them. It is certainly possible, and very probable, that the French Protestants did industriously exert themselves to raise in the Netherlands a nursery for their religion, and to prevent by all means in their power an amicable adjustment of differences between their brethren in the faith in that quarter and the King of Spain, in order to give that implacable foe of their party enough to do in his own country. It is natural, therefore, to suppose that their agents in the provinces left nothing undone to encourage their oppressed brethren with daring hopes, to nourish their animosity against the ruling church, and by exaggerating the oppression under which they sighed to hurry them imperceptibly into illegal courses. It is possible, too, that there were many among the confederates who thought to help out their own lost cause by increasing the number of their partners in guilt; who thought they could not otherwise maintain the legal character of their league unless the unfortunate results against which they had warned the king really came to pass, and who hoped in the general guilt of all to conceal their own individual criminality. It is, however, incredible that the outbreak of the Iconoclasts was the fruit of a deliberate plan, preconcerted, as it is alleged, at the convent of St. Truyen. It does not seem likely that in a solemn assembly of so many nobles and warriors, of whom the greater part were the adherents of popery, an individual should be found insane enough to propose an act of positive infamy, which did not so much injure any religious party in particular, as rather tread under foot all respect for religion in general, and even all morality too, and which could have been conceived only in the mind of the vilest reprobate. Besides, this outrage was too sudden in its outbreak, too vehement in its execution altogether, too monstrous to have been anything more than the offspring of the moment in which it saw the light; it seemed to flow so naturally from the circumstances which preceded it that it does not require to be traced far back to remount to its origin.

A rude mob, consisting of the very dregs of the populace, made brutal by harsh treatment, by sanguinary decrees which dogged them in every town, scared from place to place and driven almost to despair, were compelled to worship their God, and to hide like a work of darkness the universal, sacred privilege of humanity. Before their eyes proudly rose the temples of the dominant church, in which their haughty brethren indulged in ease their magnificent devotion, while they themselves were driven from the walls, expelled, too, by the weaker number perhaps, and forced, here in the wild woods, under the burning heat of noon, in disgraceful secrecy to worship the same God; cast out from civil society into a state of nature, and reminded in one dread moment of the rights of that state! The greater their superiority of numbers the more unnatural did their lot appear; with wonder they perceive the truth. The free heaven, the arms lying ready, the frenzy in their brains and fury in their hearts combine to aid the suggestions of some preaching fanatic; the occasion calls; no premeditation is necessary where all eyes at once declare consent; the resolution is formed ere yet the word is scarcely uttered; ready for any unlawful act, no one yet clearly knows what, the furious band rushes onwards. The smiling prosperity of the hostile religion insults the poverty of their own; the pomp of

the authorized temples casts contempt on their proscribed belief; every cross they set up upon the highway, every image of the saints that they meet, is a trophy erected over their own humiliation, and they all must be removed by their avenging hands. Fanaticism suggests these detestable proceedings, but base passions carry them into execution.

1566. The commencement of the attack on images took place in West Flanders and Artois, in the districts between Lys and the sea. A frantic herd of artisans, boatmen, and peasants, mixed with prostitutes, beggars, vagabonds, and thieves, about three hundred in number, furnished with clubs, axes, hammers, ladders, and cords (a few only were provided with swords or fire arms), cast themselves, with fanatical fury, into the villages and hamlets near St. Omer, and breaking open the gates of such churches and cloisters as they find locked, overthrow everywhere the altars, break to pieces the images of the saints, and trample them under foot. With their excitement increased by its indulgence, and reinforced by newcomers, they press on by the direct road to Ypres, where they can count on the support of a strong body of Calvinists. Unopposed, they break into the cathedral, and mounting on ladders they hammer to pieces the pictures, hew down with axes the pulpits and pews, despoil the altars of their ornaments, and steal the holy vessels. This example was quickly followed in Menin, Comines, Verrich, Lille, and Oudenard; in a few days the same fury spreads through the whole of Flanders. At the very time when the first tidings of this occurrence arrived Antwerp was swarming with a crowd of houseless people, which the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin had brought together in that city. Even the presence of the Prince of Orange was hardly sufficient to restrain the licentious mob, who burned to imitate the doings of their brethren in St. Omer; but an order from the court which summoned him to Brussels, where the regent was just assembling her council of state, in order to lay before them the royal letters, obliged him to abandon Antwerp to the outrages of this band. His departure was the signal for tumult. Apprehensive of the lawless violence of which, on the very first day of the festival, the mob had given indications in derisory allusions, the priests, after carrying about the image of the Virgin for a short time, brought it for safety to the choir, without, as formerly, setting it up in the middle of the church. This incited some mischievous boys from among the people to pay it a visit there, and jokingly inquire why she had so soon absented herself from among them? Others mounting the pulpit, mimicked the preacher, and challenged the papists to a dispute. A Roman Catholic waterman, indignant at this jest, attempted to pull them down, and blows were exchanged in the preacher's seat. Similar scenes occurred on the following evening. The numbers increased, and many came already provided with suspicious implements and secret weapons. At last it came into the head of one of them to cry, "Long live the Gueux!" immediately the whole band took up the cry, and the image of the Virgin was called upon to do the same. The few Roman Catholics who were present, and who had given up the hope of effecting anything against these desperadoes, left the church after locking all the doors except one. So soon as they found themselves alone it was proposed to sing one of the psalms in the new version, which was prohibited by the government. While they were yet singing they all, as at a given signal, rushed furiously upon the image of the Virgin, piercing it with swords and daggers, and striking off its head; thieves and prostitutes tore the great wax-lights from the altar, and lighted them to the work. The beautiful organ of the church, a masterpiece of the art of that period, was broken to pieces, all the paintings were effaced, the statues smashed to atoms. A crucifix, the size of life, which was set up between the two thieves, opposite the high altar, an ancient and highly valued piece of workmanship, was pulled to the ground with cords, and cut to pieces with axes, while the two malefactors at its side were respectfully spared. The holy wafers were strewed on the ground and trodden under foot; in the wine used for the Lord's Supper, which was accidentally found there, the health of the Gueux was drunk, while with the holy oil they rubbed their shoes. The very tombs were opened, and the half-decayed corpses torn up and trampled on. All this was done with as much wonderful regularity as if each had previously had his part assigned to him; every one worked into his neighbor's hands; no one, dangerous as the work was, met with injury; in the midst of thick darkness, which the tapers only served to render more

sensible, with heavy masses falling on all sides, and though on the very topmost steps of the ladders, they scuffled with each other for the honors of demolition — yet no one suffered the least injury. In spite of the many tapers which lighted them below in their villanous work not a single individual was recognized. With incredible rapidity was the dark deed accomplished; a number of men, at most a hundred, despoiled in a few hours a temple of seventy altars — after St. Peter's at Rome, perhaps the largest and most magnificent in Christendom.

The devastation of the cathedral did not content them; with torches and tapers purloined from it they set out at midnight to perform a similar work of havoc on the remaining churches, cloisters, and chapels. The destructive hordes increased with every fresh exploit of infamy, and thieves were allured by the opportunity. They carried away whatever they found of value — the consecrated vessels, altar-cloths, money, and vestments; in the cellars of the cloisters they drank to intoxication; to escape greater indignities the monks and nuns abandoned everything to them. The confused noises of these riotous acts had startled the citizens from their first sleep; but night made the danger appear more alarming than it really was, and instead of hastening to defend their churches the citizens fortified themselves in their houses, and in terror and anxiety awaited the dawn of morning. The rising sun at length revealed the devastation which had been going on during the night; but the havoc did not terminate with the darkness. Some churches and cloisters still remained uninjured; the same fate soon overtook them also. The work of destruction lasted three whole days. Alarmed at last lest the frantic mob, when it could no longer find anything sacred to destroy, should make a similar attack on lay property and plunder their ware houses; and encouraged, too, by discovering how small was the number of the depredators, the wealthier citizens ventured to show themselves in arms at the doors of their houses. All the gates of the town were locked but one, through which the Iconoclasts broke forth to renew the same atrocities in the rural districts. On one occasion only during all this time did the municipal officers venture to exert their authority, so strongly were they held in awe by the superior power of the Calvinists, by whom, as it was believed, this mob of miscreants was hired. The injury inflicted by this work of devastation was incalculable. In the church of the Virgin it was estimated at not less than four hundred thousand gold florins. Many precious works of art were destroyed; many valuable manuscripts; many monuments of importance to history and to diplomacy were thereby lost. The city magistrate ordered the plundered articles to be restored on pain of death; in enforcing this restitution he was effectually assisted by the preachers of the Reformers, who blushed for their followers. Much was in this manner recovered, and the ringleaders of the mob, less animated, perhaps, by the desire of plunder than by fanaticism and revenge, or perhaps being ruled by some unseen head, resolved for the future to guard against these excesses, and to make their attacks in regular bands and in better order.

The town of Ghent, meanwhile, trembled for a like destiny. Immediately on the first news of the outbreak of the Iconoclasts in Antwerp the magistrate of the former town with the most eminent citizens had bound themselves to repel by force the church spoilers; when this oath was proposed to the commonalty also the voices were divided, and many declared openly that they were by no means disposed to hinder so devout a work. In this state of affairs the Roman Catholic clergy found it advisable to deposit in the citadel the most precious movables of their churches, and private families were permitted in like manner to provide for the safety of offerings which had been made by their ancestors. Meanwhile all the services were discontinued, the courts of justice were closed; and, like a town in momentary danger of being stormed by the enemy, men trembled in expectation of what was to come. At last an insane band of rioters ventured to send delegates to the governor with this impudent message: "They were ordered," they said, "by their chiefs to take the images out of the churches, as had been done in the other towns. If they were not opposed it should be done quietly and with as little injury as possible, but otherwise they would storm the churches;" nay, they went so far in their audacity as to ask the aid of the officers of justice therein. At first the magistrate was

astounded at this demand; upon reflection, however, and in the hope that the presence of the officers of law would perhaps restrain their excesses, he did not scruple to grant their request.

In Tournay the churches were despoiled of their ornaments within sight of the garrison, who could not be induced to march against the Iconoclasts. As the latter had been told that the gold and silver vessels and other ornaments of the church were buried underground, they turned up the whole floor, and exposed, among others, the body of the Duke Adolph of Gueldres, who fell in battle at the head of the rebellious burghers of Ghent, and had been buried herein Tournay. This Adolph had waged war against his father, and had dragged the vanquished old man some miles barefoot to prison — an indignity which Charles the Bold afterwards retaliated on him. And now, again, after more than half a century fate avenged a crime against nature by another against religion; fanaticism was to desecrate that which was holy in order to expose once more to execration the bones of a parricide. Other Iconoclasts from Valenciennes united themselves with those of Tournay to despoil all the cloisters of the surrounding district, during which a valuable library, the accumulation of centuries, was destroyed by fire. The evil soon penetrated into Brabant, also Malines, Herzogenbusch, Breda, and Bergen-op-Zoom experienced the same fate. The provinces, Namur and Luxemburg, with a part of Artois and of Hainault, had alone the good fortune to escape the contagion of those outrages. In the short period of four or five days four hundred cloisters were plundered in Brabant and Flanders alone.

The northern Netherlands were soon seized with the same mania which had raged so violently through the southern. The Dutch towns, Amsterdam, Leyden, and Gravenhaag, had the alternative of either voluntarily stripping their churches of their ornaments, or of seeing them violently torn from there; the determination of their magistrates saved Delft, Haarlem, Gouda, and Rotterdam from the devastation. The same acts of violence were practised also in the islands of Zealand; the town of Utrecht and many places in Overyssel and Groningen suffered the same storms. Friesland was protected by the Count of Aremberg, and Gueldres by the Count of Megen from a like fate. An exaggerated report of these disturbances which came in from the provinces spread the alarm to Brussels, where the regent had just made preparations for an extraordinary session of the council of state. Swarms of Iconoclasts already penetrated into Brabant; and the metropolis, where they were certain of powerful support, was threatened by them with a renewal of the same atrocities then under the very eyes of majesty. The regent, in fear for her personal safety, which, even in the heart of the country, surrounded by provincial governors and Knights of the Fleece, she fancied insecure, was already meditating a flight to Mons, in Hainault, which town the Duke of Arschot held for her as a place of refuge, that she might not be driven to any undignified concession by falling into the power of the Iconoclasts. In vain did the knights pledge life and blood for her safety, and urgently beseech her not to expose them to disgrace by so dishonorable a flight, as though they were wanting in courage or zeal to protect their princess; to no purpose did the town of Brussels itself supplicate her not to abandon them in this extremity, and vainly did the council of state make the most impressive representations that so pusillanimous a step would not fail to encourage still more the insolence of the rebels; she remained immovable in this desperate condition. As messenger after messenger arrived to warn her that the Iconoclasts were advancing against the metropolis, she issued orders to hold everything in readiness for her flight, which was to take place quietly with the first approach of morning. At break of day the aged Viglius presented himself before her, whom, with the view of gratifying the nobles, she had been long accustomed to neglect. He demanded to know the meaning of the preparations he observed, upon which she at last confessed that she intended to make her escape, and assured him that he would himself do well to secure his own safety by accompanying her. "It is now two years," said the old man to her, "that you might have anticipated these results. Because I have spoken more freely than your courtiers you have closed your princely ear to me, which has been open only to pernicious suggestions." The regent allowed that she had been in fault, and had been blinded by an appearance of probity; but that she was now driven by necessity. "Are you resolved," answered Viglius, "resolutely to insist upon obedience to the royal commands?" "I am," answered the duchess.

"Then have recourse to the great secret of the art of government, to dissimulation, and pretend to join the princes until, with their assistance, you have repelled this storm. Show them a confidence which you are far from feeling in your heart. Make them take an oath to you that they will make common cause in resisting these disorders. Trust those as your friends who show themselves willing to do it; but be careful to avoid frightening away the others by contemptuous treatment." Viglius kept the regent engaged in conversation until the princes arrived, who he was quite certain would in nowise consent to her flight. When they appeared he quietly withdrew in order to issue commands to the town council to close the gates of the city and prohibit egress to every one connected with the court. This last measure effected more than all the representations had done. The regent, who saw herself a prisoner in her own capital, now yielded to the persuasions of the nobles, who pledged themselves to stand by her to the last drop of blood. She made Count Mansfeld commandant of the town, who hastily increased the garrison and armed her whole court.

The state council was now held, who finally came to a resolution that it was expedient to yield to the emergency; to permit the preachings in those places where they had already commenced; to make known the abolition of the papal Inquisition; to declare the old edicts against the heretics repealed, and before all things to grant the required indemnity to the confederate nobles, without limitation or condition. At the same time the Prince of Orange, Counts Egmont and Horn, with some others, were appointed to confer on this head with the deputies of the league. Solemnly and in the most unequivocal terms the members of the league were declared free from all responsibility by reason of the petition which had been presented, and all royal officers and authorities were enjoined to act in conformity with this assurance, and neither now nor for the future to inflict any injury upon any of the confederates on account of the said petition. In return, the confederates bound themselves to be true and loyal servants of his majesty, to contribute to the utmost of their power to the re-establishment of order and the punishment of the Iconiclasts, to prevail on the people to lay down their arms, and to afford active assistance to the king against internal and foreign enemies. Securities, formally drawn up and subscribed by the plenipotentiaries of both sides, were exchanged between them; the letter of indemnity, in particular, was signed by the duchess with her own hand and attested by her seal. It was only after a severe struggle, and with tears in her eyes, that the regent, as she tremblingly confessed to the king, was at last induced to consent to this painful step. She threw the whole blame upon the nobles, who had kept her a prisoner in Brussels and compelled her to it by force. Above all she complained bitterly of the Prince of Orange.

This business accomplished, all the governors hastened to their provinces; Egmont to Flanders, Orange to Antwerp. In the latter city the Protestants had seized the despoiled and plundered churches, and, as if by the rights of war, had taken possession of them. The prince restored them to their lawful owners, gave orders for their repair, and re-established in them the Roman Catholic form of worship. Three of the Iconoclasts, who had been convicted, paid the penalty of their sacrilege on the gallows; some of the rioters were banished, and many others underwent punishment. Afterwards he assembled four deputies of each dialect, or nations, as they were termed, and agreed with them that, as the approaching winter made preaching in the open air impossible, three places within the town should be granted then, where they might either erect new churches, or convert private houses to that purpose. That they should there perform their service every Sunday and holiday, and always at the same hour, but on no other days. If, however, no holiday happened in the week, Wednesday should be kept by them instead. No religious party should maintain more than two clergymen, and these must be native Netherlanders, or at least have received naturalization from some considerable town of the provinces. All should take an oath to submit in civil matters to the municipal authorities and the Prince of Orange. They should be liable, like the other citizens, to all imposts. No one should attend sermons armed; a sword, however, should be allowed to each. No preacher should assail the ruling religion from the pulpit, nor enter upon controverted points, beyond what the doctrine itself rendered unavoidable, or what might refer to morals. No psalm should be sung by them out of their

appointed district. At the election of their preachers, churchwardens, and deacons, as also at all their other consistorial meetings, a person from the government should on each occasion be present to report their proceedings to the prince and the magistrate. As to all other points they should enjoy the same protection as the ruling religion. This arrangement was to hold good until the king, with consent of the states, should determine otherwise; but then it should be free to every one to quit the country with his family and his property. From Antwerp the prince hastened to Holland, Zealand, and Utrecht, in order to make there similar arrangements for the restoration of peace; Antwerp, however, was, during his absence, entrusted to the superintendence of Count Howstraten, who was a mild man, and although an adherent of the league, had never failed in loyalty to the king. It is evident that in this agreement the prince had far overstepped the powers entrusted to him, and though in the service of the king had acted exactly like a sovereign lord. But he alleged in excuse that it would be far easier to the magistrate to watch these numerous and powerful sects if he himself interfered in their worship, and if this took place under his eyes, than if he were to leave the sectarians to themselves in the open air.

In Gueldres Count Megen showed more severity, and entirely suppressed the Protestant sects and banished all their preachers. In Brussels the regent availed herself of the advantage derived from her personal presence to put a stop to the public preaching, even outside the town. When, in reference to this, Count Nassau reminded her in the name of the confederates of the compact which had been entered into, and demanded if the town of Brussels had inferior rights to the other towns? she answered, if there were public preachings in Brussels before the treaty, it was not her work if they were now discontinued. At the same time, however, she secretly gave the citizens to understand that the first who should venture to attend a public sermon should certainly be hung. Thus she kept the capital at least faithful to her.

It was more difficult to quiet Tournay, which office was committed to Count Horn, in the place of Montigny, to whose government the town properly belonged. Horn commanded the Protestants to vacate the churches immediately, and to content themselves with a house of worship outside the walls. To this their preachers objected that the churches were erected for the use of the people, by which terms, they said, not the heads but the majority were meant. If they were expelled from the Roman Catholic churches it was at least fair that they should be furnished with money for erecting churches of their own. To this the magistrate replied even if the Catholic party was the weaker it was indisputably the better. The erection of churches should not be forbidden them; they could not, however, after the injury which the town had already suffered from their brethren, the Iconoclasts, very well expect that it should be further burdened by the erection of their churches. After long quarrelling on both sides, the Protestants contrived to retain possession of some churches, which, for greater security, they occupied with guards. In Valenciennes, too, the Protestants refused submission to the conditions which were offered to them through Philip St. Aldegonde, Baron of Noircarmes, to whom, in the absence of the Marquis of Bergen, the government of that place was entrusted. A reformed preacher, La Grange, a Frenchman by birth, who by his eloquence had gained a complete command over them, urged them to insist on having churches of their own within the town, and to threaten in case of refusal to deliver it up to the Huguenots. A sense of the superior numbers of the Calvinists, and of their understanding with the Huguenots, prevented the governor adopting forcible measures against them.

Count Egmont, also to manifest his zeal for the king's service, did violence to his natural kind-heartedness. Introducing a garrison into the town of Ghent, he caused some of the most refractory rebels to be put to death. The churches were reopened, the Roman Catholic worship renewed, and all foreigners, without exception, ordered to quit the province. To the Calvinists, but to them alone, a site was granted outside the town for the erection of a church. In return they were compelled to pledge themselves to the most rigid obedience to the municipal authorities, and to active co-operation in the proceedings against the Iconoclasts. He pursued similar measures through all Flanders and Artois. One of his noblemen, John Cassembrot, Baron of Beckerzeel, and a leaguer, pursuing the Iconoclasts

at the head of some horsemen of the league, surprised a band of them just as they were about to break into a town of Hainault, near Grammont, in Flanders, and took thirty of them prisoners, of whom twenty-two were hung upon the spot, and the rest whipped out of the province.

Services of such importance one would have thought scarcely deserved to be rewarded with the displeasure of the king; what Orange, Egmont, and Horn performed on this occasion evinced at least as much zeal and had as beneficial a result as anything that was accomplished by Noircarmes, Megen, and Aremberg, to whom the king vouchsafed to show his gratitude both by words and deeds. But their zeal, their services came too late. They had spoken too loudly against his edicts, had been too vehement in their opposition to his measures, had insulted him too grossly in the person of his minister Granvella, to leave room for forgiveness. No time, no repentance, no atonement, however great, could efface this one offence from the memory of their sovereign.

Philip lay sick at Segovia when the news of the outbreak of the Iconoclasts and the uncatholic agreement entered into with the Reformers reached him. At the same time the regent renewed her urgent entreaty for his personal visit, of which also all the letters treated, which the President Viglius exchanged with his friend Hopper. Many also of the Belgian nobles addressed special letters to the king, as, for instance, Egmont, Mansfeld, Megen, Aremberg, Noircarmes, and Barlaimont, in which they reported the state of their provinces, and at once explained and justified the arrangements they had made with the disaffected. Just at this period a letter arrived from the German Emperor, in which he recommended Philip to act with clemency towards his Belgian subjects, and offered his mediation in the matter. He had also written direct to the regent herself in Brussels, and added letters to the several leaders of the nobility, which, however, were never delivered. Having conquered the first anger which this hateful occurrence had excited, the king referred the whole matter to his council.

The party of Granvella, which had the preponderance in the council, was diligent in tracing a close connection between the behavior of the Flemish nobles and the excesses of the church desecrators, which showed itself in similarity of the demands of both parties, and especially the time which the latter chose for their outbreak. In the same month, they observed, in which the nobles had sent in their three articles of pacification, the Iconoclasts had commenced their work; on the evening of the very day that Orange quitted Antwerp the churches too were plundered. During the whole tumult not a finger was lifted to take up arms; all the expedients employed were invariably such as turned to the advantage of the sects, while, on the contrary, all others were neglected which tended to the maintenance of the pure faith. Many of the Iconoclasts, it was further said, had confessed that all that they had done was with the knowledge and consent of the princes; though surely nothing was more natural, than for such worthless wretches to seek to screen with great names a crime which they had undertaken solely on their own account. A writing also was produced in which the high nobility were made to promise their services to the "Gueux," to procure the assembly of the states general, the genuineness of which, however, the former strenuously denied. Four different seditious parties were, they said, to be noticed in the Netherlands, which were all more or less connected with one another, and all worked towards a common end. One of these was those bands of reprobates who desecrated the churches; a second consisted of the various sects who had hired the former to perform their infamous acts; the "Gueux," who had raised themselves to be the defenders of the sects were the third; and the leading nobles who were inclined to the "Gueux" by feudal connections, relationship, and friendship, composed the fourth. All, consequently, were alike fatally infected, and all equally guilty. The government had not merely to guard against a few isolated members; it had to contend with the whole body. Since, then, it was ascertained that the people were the seduced party, and the encouragement to rebellion came from higher quarters, it would be wise and expedient to alter the plan hitherto adopted, which now appeared defective in several respects. Inasmuch as all classes had been oppressed without distinction, and as much of severity shown to the lower orders as of contempt to the nobles, both had been compelled to lend support to one another; a party had been given to the latter and leaders to the former. Unequal treatment seemed an infallible expedient to separate them;

the mob, always timid and indolent when not goaded by the extremity of distress, would very soon desert its adored protectors and quickly learn to see in their fate well-merited retribution if only it was not driven to share it with them. It was therefore proposed to the king to treat the great multitude for the future with more leniency, and to direct all measures of severity against the leaders of the faction. In order, however, to avoid the appearance of a disgraceful concession, it was considered advisable to accept the mediation of the Emperor, and to impute to it alone and not to the justice of their demands, that the king out of pure generosity had granted to his Belgian subjects as much as they asked.

The question of the king's personal visit to the provinces was now again mooted, and all the difficulties which had formerly been raised on this head appeared to vanish before the present emergency. "Now," said Tyssenacque and Hopper, "the juncture has really arrived at which the king, according to his own declaration formerly made to Count Egmont, will be ready to risk a thousand lives. To restore quiet to Ghent Charles V. had undertaken a troublesome and dangerous journey through an enemy's country. This was done for the sake of a single town; and now the peace, perhaps even the possession, of all the United Provinces was at stake." This was the opinion of the majority; and the journey of the king was looked upon as a matter from which he could not possibly any longer escape.

The question now was, whether he should enter upon it with a numerous body of attendants or with few; and here the Prince of Eboli and Count Figueroa were at issue with the Duke of Alva, as their private interests clashed. If the king journeyed at the head of an army the presence of the Duke of Alva would be indispensable, who, on the other hand, if matters were peaceably adjusted, would be less required, and must make room for his rivals. "An army," said Figueroa, who spoke first, "would alarm the princes through whose territories it must march, and perhaps even be opposed by them; it would, moreover, unnecessarily burden the provinces for whose tranquillization it was intended, and add a new grievance to the many which had already driven the people to such lengths. It would press indiscriminately upon all of the king's subjects, whereas a court of justice, peaceably administering its office, would observe a marked distinction between the innocent and the guilty. The unwonted violence of the former course would tempt the leaders of the faction to take a more alarming view of their behavior, in which wantonness and levity had the chief share, and consequently induce them to proceed with deliberation and union; the thought of having forced the king to such lengths would plunge them into despair, in which they would be ready to undertake anything. If the king placed himself in arms against the rebels he would forfeit the most important advantage which he possessed over them, namely, his authority as sovereign of the country, which would prove the more powerful in proportion as he showed his reliance upon that alone. He would place himself thereby, as it were, on a level with the rebels, who on their side would not be at a loss to raise an army, as the universal hatred of the Spanish forces would operate in their favor with the nation. By this procedure the king would exchange the certain advantage which his position as sovereign of the country conferred upon him for the uncertain result of military operations, which, result as they might, would of necessity destroy a portion of his own subjects. The rumor of his hostile approach would outrun him time enough to allow all who were conscious of a bad cause to place themselves in a posture of defence, and to combine and render availing both their foreign and domestic resources. Here again the general alarm would do them important service; the uncertainty who would be the first object of this warlike approach would drive even the less guilty to the general mass of the rebels, and force those to become enemies to the king who otherwise would never have been so. If, however, he was coming among them without such a formidable accompaniment; if his appearance was less that of a sanguinary judge than of an angry parent, the courage of all good men would rise, and the bad would perish in their own security. They would persuade themselves what had happened was unimportant; that it did not appear to the king of sufficient moment to call for strong measures. They wished if they could to avoid the chance of ruining, by acts of open violence, a cause which might perhaps yet be saved; consequently, by this quiet, peaceable method everything would be gained which by the other would be irretrievably lost;

the loyal subject would in no degree be involved in the same punishment with the culpable rebel; on the latter alone would the whole weight of the royal indignation descend. Lastly, the enormous expenses would be avoided which the transport of a Spanish army to those distant regions would occasion.

"But," began the Duke of Alva, "ought the injury of some few citizens to be considered when danger impends over the whole? Because a few of the loyally-disposed may suffer wrong are the rebels therefore not to be chastised? The offence has been universal, why then should not the punishment be the same? What the rebels have incurred by their actions the rest have incurred equally by their supineness. Whose fault is it but theirs that the former have so far succeeded? Why did they not promptly oppose their first attempts? It is said that circumstances were not so desperate as to justify this violent remedy; but who will insure us that they will not be so by the time the king arrives, especially when, according to every fresh despatch of the regent, all is hastening with rapid strides to a-ruinous consummation? Is it a hazard we ought to run to leave the king to discover on his entrance into the provinces the necessity of his having brought with him a military force? It is a fact only too well-established that the rebels have secured foreign succors, which stand ready at their command on the first signal; will it then be time to think of preparing for war when the enemy pass the frontiers? Is it a wise risk to rely for aid upon the nearest Belgian troops when their loyalty is so little to be depended upon? And is not the regent perpetually reverting in her despatches to the fact that nothing but the want of a suitable military force has hitherto hindered her from enforcing the edicts, and stopping the progress of the rebels? A well-disciplined and formidable army alone will disappoint all their hopes of maintaining themselves in opposition to their lawful sovereign, and nothing but the certain prospect of destruction will make them lower their demands. Besides, without an adequate force, the king cannot venture his person in hostile countries; he cannot enter into any treaties with his rebellious subjects which would not be derogatory to his honor."

The authority of the speaker gave preponderance to his arguments, and the next question was, when the king should commence his journey and what road he should take. As the voyage by sea was on every account extremely hazardous, he had no other alternative but either to proceed thither through the passes near Trent across. Germany, or to penetrate from Savoy over the Apennine Alps. The first route would expose him to the danger of the attack of the German Protestants, who were not likely to view with indifference the objects of his journey, and a passage over the Apennines was at this late season of the year not to be attempted. Moreover, it would be necessary to send for the requisite galleys from Italy, and repair them, which would take several months. Finally, as the assembly of the Cortes of Castile, from which he could not well be absent, was already appointed for December, the journey could not be undertaken before the spring. Meanwhile the regent pressed for explicit instructions how she was to extricate herself from her present embarrassment, without compromising the royal dignity too far; and it was necessary to do something in the interval till the king could undertake to appease the troubles by his personal presence. Two separate letters were therefore despatched to the duchess; one public, which she could lay before the states and the council chambers, and one private, which was intended for herself alone. In the first, the king announced to her his restoration to health, and the fortunate birth of the Infanta Clara Isabella Eugenia, afterwards wife of the Archduke Albert of Austria and Princess of the Netherlands. He declared to her his present firm intention to visit the Netherlands in person, for which he was already making the necessary preparations. The assembling of the states he refused, as he had previously done. No mention was made in this letter of the agreement which she had entered into with the Protestants and with the league, because he did not deem it advisable at present absolutely to reject it, and he was still less disposed to acknowledge its validity. On the other hand, he ordered her to reinforce the army, to draw together new regiments from Germany, and to meet the refractory with force. For the rest, he concluded, he relied upon the loyalty of the leading nobility, among whom he knew many who were sincere in their attachment both to their religion and their king. In the secret letter she was again enjoined to do all in her power to prevent the assembling of the states; but if the general voice should

become irresistible, and she was compelled to yield, she was at least to manage so cautiously that the royal dignity should not suffer, and no one learn the king's consent to their assembly.

While these consultations were held in Spain the Protestants in the Netherlands made the most extensive use of the privileges which had been compulsorily granted to them. The erection of churches wherever it was permitted was completed with incredible rapidity; young and old, gentle and simple, assisted in carrying stones; women sacrificed even their ornaments in order to accelerate the work. The two religious parties established in several towns consistories, and a church council of their own, the first move of the kind being made in Antwerp, and placed their form of worship on a well-regulated footing. It was also proposed to raise a common fund by subscription to meet any sudden emergency of the Protestant church in general. In Antwerp a memorial was presented by the Calvinists of that town to the Count of Hogstraten, in which they offered to pay three millions of dollars to secure the free exercise of their religion. Many copies of this writing were circulated in the Netherlands; and in order to stimulate others, many had ostentatiously subscribed their names to large sums. Various interpretations of this extravagant offer were made by the enemies of the Reformers, and all had some appearance of reason. For instance, it was urged that under the pretext of collecting the requisite sum for fulfilling this engagement they hoped, without suspicion, to raise funds for military purposes; for whether they should be called upon to contribute for or against they would, it was thought, be more ready to burden themselves with a view of preserving peace than for an oppressive and devasting war. Others saw in this offer nothing more than a temporary stratagem of the Protestants by which they hoped to bind the court and keep it irresolute until they should have gained sufficient strength to confront it. Others again declared it to be a downright bravado in order to alarm the regent, and to raise the courage of their own party by the display of such rich resources. But whatever was the true motive of this proposition, its originators gained little by it; the contributions flowed in scantily and slowly, and the court answered the proposal with silent contempt. The excesses, too, of the Iconoclasts, far from promoting the cause of the league and advancing the Protestants interests, had done irreparable injury to both. The sight of their ruined churches, which, in the language of Viglius, resembled stables more than houses of God, enraged the Roman Catholics, and above all the clergy. All of that religion, who had hitherto been members of the league, now forsook it, alleging that even if it had not intentionally excited and encouraged the excesses of the Iconoclasts it had beyond question remotely led to them. The intolerance of the Calvinists who, wherever they were the ruling party, cruelly oppressed the Roman Catholics, completely expelled the delusion in which the latter had long indulged, and they withdrew their support from a party from which, if they obtained the upper hand, their own religion had so much cause to fear. Thus the league lost many of its best members; the friends and patrons, too, which it had hitherto found amongst the well-disposed citizens now deserted it, and its character began perceptibly to decline. The severity with which some of its members had acted against the Iconoclasts in order to prove their good disposition towards the regent, and to remove the suspicion of any connection with the malcontents, had also injured them with the people who favored the latter, and thus the league was in danger of ruining itself with both parties at the same time. The regent had no sooner became acquainted with this change in the public mind than she devised a plan by which she hoped gradually to dissolve the whole league, or at least to enfeeble it through internal dissensions. For this end she availed herself of the private letters which the king had addressed to some of the nobles, and enclosed to her with full liberty to use them at her discretion. These letters, which overflowed with kind expressions were presented to those for whom they were intended, with an attempt at secrecy, which designedly miscarried, so that on each occasion some one or other of those who had received nothing of the sort got a hint of them. In order to spread suspicion the more widely numerous copies of the letters were circulated. This artifice attained its object. Many members of the league began to doubt the honesty of those to whom such brilliant promises were made; through fear of being deserted by their principal members and supporters, they eagerly accepted the conditions which were offered them by the regent, and evinced great anxiety

for a speedy reconciliation with the court. The general rumor of the impending visit of the king, which the regent took care to have widely circulated, was also of great service to her in this matter; many who could not augur much good to themselves from the royal presence did not hesitate to accept a pardon, which, perhaps, for what they could tell, was offered them for the last time. Among those who thus received private letters were Egmont and Prince of Orange. Both had complained to the king of the evil reports with which designing persons in Spain had labored to brand their names, and to throw suspicion on their motives and intentions; Egmont, in particular, with the honest simplicity which was peculiar to his character, had asked the monarch only to point out to him what he most desired, to determine the particular action by which his favor could be best obtained and zeal in his service evinced, and it should, he assured him, be done. The king in reply caused the president, Von Tyssenacque, to tell him that he could do nothing better to refute his traducers than to show perfect submission to the royal orders, which were so clearly and precisely drawn up, that no further exposition of them was required, nor any particular instruction. It was the sovereign's part to deliberate, to examine, and to decide; unconditionally to obey was the duty of the subject; the honor of the latter consisted in his obedence. It did not become a member to hold itself wiser than the head. He was assuredly to be blamed for not having done his utmost to curb the unruliness of his sectarians; but it was even yet in his power to make up for past negligence by at least maintaining peace and order until the actual arrival of the king. In thus punishing Count Egmont with reproofs like a disobedient child, the king treated him in accordance with what he knew of his character; with his friend he found it necessary to call in the aid of artifice and deceit. Orange, too, in his letter, had alluded to the suspicions which the king entertained of his loyalty and attachment, but not, like Egmont, in the vain hope of removing them; for this, he had long given up; but in order to pass from these complaints to a request for permission to resign his offices. He had already frequently made this request to the regent, but had always received from her a refusal, accompanied with the strongest assurance of her regard. The king also, to whom he now at last addressed a direct application, returned him the same answer, graced with similar strong assurances of his satisfaction and gratitude. In particular he expressed the high satisfaction he entertained of his services, which he had lately rendered the crown in Antwerp, and lamented deeply that the private affairs of the prince (which the latter had made his chief plea for demanding his dismissal) should have fallen into such disorder; but ended with the declaration that it was impossible for him to dispense with his valuable services at a crisis which demanded the increase, rather than diminution, of his good and honest servants. He had thought, he added, that the prince entertained a better opinion of him than to suppose him capable of giving credit to the idle talk of certain persons, who were friends neither to the prince nor to himself. But, at the same time, to give him a proof of his sincerity, he complained to him in confidence of his brother, the Count of Nassau, pretended to ask his advice in the matter, and finally expressed a wish to have the count removed for a period from the Netherlands.

But Philip had here to do with a head which in cunning was superior to his own. The Prince of Orange had for a long time held watch over him and his privy council in Madrid and Segovia, through a host of spies, who reported to him everything of importance that was transacted there. The court of this most secret of all despots had become accessible to his intriguing spirit and his money; in this manner he had gained possession of several autograph letters of the regent, which she had secretly written to Madrid, and had caused copies to be circulated in triumph in Brussels, and in a measure under her own eyes, insomuch that she saw with astonishment in everybody's hands what she thought was preserved with so much care, and entreated the king for the future to destroy her despatches immediately they were read. William's vigilance did not confine itself simply to the court of Spain; he had spies in France, and even at more distant courts. He is also charged with not being over scrupulous as to the means by which he acquired his intelligence. But the most important disclosure was made by an intercepted letter of the Spanish ambassador in France, Francis Von Alava, to the duchess, in which the former descanted on the fair opportunity which was now afforded to the king, through the

guilt of the Netherlandish people, of establishing an arbitrary power in that country. He therefore advised her to deceive the nobles by the very arts which they had hitherto employed against herself, and to secure them through smooth words and an obliging behavior. The king, he concluded, who knew the nobles to be the hidden springs of all the previous troubles, would take good care to lay hands upon them at the first favorable opportunity, as well as the two whom he had already in Spain; and did not mean to let them go again, having sworn to make an example in them which should horrify the whole of Christendom, even if it should cost him his hereditary dominions. This piece of evil news was strongly corroborated by the letters which Bergen and Montigny wrote from Spain, and in which they bitterly complained of the contemptuous behavior of the grandees and the altered deportment of the monarch towards them; and the Prince of Orange was now fully sensible what he had to expect from the fair promises of the king.

The letter of the minister, Alava, together with some others from Spain, which gave a circumstantial account of the approaching warlike visit of the king, and of his evil intentions against the nobles, was laid by the prince before his brother, Count Louis of Nassau, Counts Egmont, Horn, and Hogstraten, at a meeting at Dendermonde in Flanders, whither these five knights had repaired to confer on the measures necessary for their security. Count Louis, who listened only to his feelings of indignation, foolhardily maintained that they ought, without loss of time, to take up arms and seize some strongholds. That they ought at all risks to prevent the king's armed entrance into the provinces. That they should endeavor to prevail on the Swiss, the Protestant princes of Germany, and the Huguenots to arm and obstruct his passage through their territories; and if, notwithstanding, he should force his way through these impediments, that the Flemings should meet him with an army on the frontiers. He would take upon himself to negotiate a defensive alliance in France, in Switzerland, and in Germany, and to raise in the latter empire four thousand horse, together with a proportionate body of infantry. Pretexts would not be wanting for collecting the requisite supplies of money, and the merchants of the reformed sect would, he felt assured, not fail them. But William, more cautious and more wise, declared himself against this proposal, which, in the execution, would be exposed to numberless difficulties, and had as yet nothing to justify it. The Inquisition, he represented, was in fact abolished, the edicts were nearly sunk into oblivion, and a fair degree of religious liberty accorded. Hitherto, therefore, there existed no valid or adequate excuse for adopting this hostile method; he did not doubt, however, that one would be presented to them before long, and in good time for preparation. His own opinion consequently was that they should await this opportunity with patience, and in the meanwhile still keep a watchful eye upon everything, and contrive to give the people a hint of the threatened danger, that they might be ready to act if circumstances should call for their co-operation. If all present had assented to the opinion of the Prince of Orange, there is no doubt but so powerful a league, formidable both by the influence and the high character of its members, would have opposed obstacles to the designs of the king which would have compelled him to abandon them entirely. But the determination of the assembled knights was much shaken by the declaration with which Count Egmont surprised them. "Rather," said he, "may all that is evil befall me than that I should tempt fortune so rashly. The idle talk of the Spaniard, Alava, does not move me; how should such a person be able to read the mind of a sovereign so reserved as Philip, and to decipher his secrets? The intelligence which Montigny gives us goes to prove nothing more than that the king has a very doubtful opinion of our zeal for his service, and believes he has cause to distrust our loyalty; and for this I for my part must confess that we have given him only too much cause. And it is my serious purpose, by redoubling my zeal, to regain his good opinion, and by my future behavior to remove, if possible, the distrust which my actions have hitherto excited. How could I tear myself from the arms of my numerous and dependent family to wander as an exile at foreign courts, a burden to every one who received me, the slave of every one who condescended to assist me, a servant of foreigners, in order to escape a slight degree of constraint at home? Never can the monarch act unkindly towards a servant who was once beloved and dear to him, and who has established a well-grounded claim

to his gratitude. Never shall I be persuaded that he who has expressed such favorable, such gracious sentiments towards his Belgian subjects, and with his own mouth gave me such emphatic, such solemn assurances, can be now devising, as it is pretended, such tyrannical schemes against them. If we do but restore to the country its former repose, chastise the rebels, and re-establish the Roman Catholic form of worship wherever it has been violently suppressed, then, believe me, we shall hear no more of Spanish troops. This is the course to which I now invite you all by my counsel and my example, and to which also most of our brethren already incline. I, for my part, fear nothing from the anger of the king. My conscience acquits me. I trust my fate and fortunes to his justice and clemency." In vain did Nassau, Horn, and Orange labor to shake his resolution, and to open his eyes to the near and inevitable danger. Egmont was really attached to the king; the royal favors, and the condescension with which they were conferred, were still fresh in his remembrance. The attentions with which the monarch had distinguished him above all his friends had not failed of their effect. It was more from false shame than from party spirit that he had defended the cause of his countrymen against him; more from temperament and natural kindness of heart than from tried principles that he had opposed the severe measures of the government. The love of the nation, which worshipped him as its idol, carried him away. Too vain to renounce a title which sounded so agreeable, he had been compelled to do something to deserve it; but a single look at his family, a harsher designation applied to his conduct, a dangerous inference drawn from it, the mere sound of crime, terrified him from his self-delusion, and scared him back in haste and alarm to his duty.

Orange's whole plan was frustrated by Egmont's withdrawal. The latter possessed the hearts of the people and the confidence of the army, without which it was utterly impossible to undertake anything effective. The rest had reckoned with so much certainty upon him that his unexpected defection rendered the whole meeting nugatory. They therefore separated without coming to a determination. All who had met in Dendermonde were expected in the council of state in Brussels; but Egmont alone repaired thither. The regent wished to sift him on the subject of this conference, but she could extract nothing further from him than the production of the letter of Alava, of which he had purposely taken a copy, and which, with the bitterest reproofs, he laid before her. At first she changed color at sight of it, but quickly recovering herself, she boldly declared that it was a forgery. "How can this letter," she said, "really come from Alava, when I miss none? And would he who pretends to have intercepted it have spared the other letters? Nay, how can it be true, when not a single packet has miscarried, nor a single despatch failed to come to hand? How, too, can it be thought likely that the king would have made Alava master of a secret which he has not communicated even to me?"

CIVIL WAR

1566. Meanwhile the regent hastened to take advantage of the schism amongst the nobles to complete the ruin of the league, which was already tottering under the weight of internal dissensions. Without loss of time she drew from Germany the troops which Duke Eric of Brunswick was holding in readiness, augmented the cavalry, and raised five regiments of Walloons, the command of which she gave to Counts Mansfeld, Megen, Aremberg, and others. To the prince, likewise, she felt it necessary to confide troops, both because she did not wish, by withholding them pointedly, to insult him, and also because the provinces of which he was governor were in urgent need of them; but she took the precaution of joining with him a Colonel Waldenfinger, who should watch all his steps and thwart his measures if they appeared dangerous. To Count Egmont the clergy in Flanders paid a contribution of forty thousand gold florins for the maintenance of fifteen hundred men, whom he distributed among the places where danger was most apprehended. Every governor was ordered to increase his military force, and to provide himself with ammunition. These energetic preparations, which were making in all places, left no doubt as to the measures which the regent would adopt in future. Conscious of her superior force, and certain of this important support, she now ventured to change her tone, and to employ quite another language with the rebels. She began to put the most arbitrary interpretation on the concessions which, through fear and necessity, she had made to the Protestants, and to restrict all the liberties which she had tacitly granted them to the mere permission of their preaching. All other religious exercises and rites, which yet appeared to be involved in the former privilege, were by new edicts expressly forbidden, and all offenders in such matters were to be proceeded against as traitors. The Protestants were permitted to think differently from the ruling church upon the sacrament, but to receive it differently was a crime; baptism, marriage, burial, after their fashion, were probibited under pain of death. It was a cruel mockery to allow them their religion, and forbid the exercise of it; but this mean artifice of the regent to escape from the obligation of her pledged word was worthy of the pusillanimity with which she had submitted to its being extorted from her. She took advantage of the most trifling innovations and the smallest excesses to interrupt the preachings; and some of the preachers, under the charge of having performed their office in places not appointed to them, were brought to trial, condemned, and executed. On more than one occasion the regent publicly declared that the confederates had taken unfair advantage of her fears, and that she did not feel herself bound by an engagement which had been extorted from her by threats.

Of all the Belgian towns which had participated in the insurrection of the Iconoclasts none had caused the regent so much alarm as the town of Valenciennes, in Hainault. In no other was the party of the Calvinists so powerful, and the spirit of rebellion for which the province of Hainault had always made itself conspicuous, seemed to dwell here as in its native place. The propinquity of France, to which, as well by language as by manners, this town appeared to belong, rather than to the Netherlands, had from the first led to its being governed with great mildness and forbearance, which, however, only taught it to feel its own importance. At the last outbreak of the church-desecrators it had been on the point of surrendering to the Huguenots, with whom it maintained the closest understanding. The slightest excitement night renew this danger. On this account Valenciennes was the first town to which the regent proposed, as soon as should be in her power, to send a strong garrison. Philip of Noircarmes, Baron of St. Aldegonde, Governor of Hainault in the place of the absent Marquis of Bergen, had received this charge, and now appeared at the head of an army before its walls. Deputies came to meet him on the part of the magistrate from the town, to petition against the garrison, because the Protestant citizens, who were the superior number, had declared against it. Noircarnes acquainted them with the will of the regent, and gave them the choice between the garrison or a siege. He assured them that not more than four squadrons of horse and six companies of foot should be imposed upon the town; and for this he would give them his son as a hostage.

These terms were laid before the magistrate, who, for his part, was much inclined to accept them. But Peregrine Le Grange, the preacher, and the idol of the populace, to whom it was of vital importance to prevent a submission of which he would inevitably become the victim, appeared at the head of his followers, and by his powerful eloquence excited the people to reject the conditions. When their answer was brought to Noircarmes, contrary to all law of nations, he caused the messengers to be placed in irons, and carried them away with him as prisoners; he was, however, by express command of the regent, compelled to set them free again. The regent, instructed by secret orders from Madrid to exercise as much forbearance as possible, caused the town to be repeatedly summoned to receive the garrison; when, however, it obstinately persisted in its refusal, it was declared by public edict to be in rebellion, and Noircarmes was authorized to commence the siege in form. The other provinces were forbidden to assist this rebellious town with advice, money, or arms. All the property contained in it was confiscated. In order to let it see the war before it began in earnest, and to give it time for rational reflection, Noircarmes drew together troops from all Hainault and Cambray (1566), took possession of St. Amant, and placed garrisons in all adjacent places.

The line of conduct adopted towards Valenciennes allowed the other towns which were similarly situated to infer the fate which was intended for them also, and at once put the whole league in motion. An army of the Gueux, between three thousand and four thousand strong, which was hastily collected from the rabble of fugitives, and the remaining bands of the Iconoclasts, appeared in the territories of Tournay and Lille, in order to secure these two towns, and to annoy the enemy at Valenciennes. The commandant of Lille was fortunate enough to maintain that place by routing a detachment of this army, which, in concert with the Protestant inhabitants, had made an attempt to get possession of it. At the same time the army of the Gueux, which was uselessly wasting its time at Lannoy, was surprised by Noircarmes and almost entirely annihilated. The few who with desperate courage forced their way through the enemy, threw themselves into the town of Tournay, which was immediately summoned by the victor to open its gates and admit a garrison. Its prompt obedience obtained for it a milder fate. Noircarmes contented himself with abolishing the Protestant consistory, banishing the preachers, punishing the leaders of the rebels, and again re-establishing the Roman Catholic worship, which he found almost entirely suppressed. After giving it a steadfast Roman Catholic as governor, and leaving in it a sufficient garrison, he again returned with his victorious army to Valenciennes to press the siege.

This town, confident in its strength, actively prepared for defence, firmly resolved to allow things to come to extremes before it surrendered. The inhabitants had not neglected to furnish themselves with ammunition and provisions for a long siege; all who could carry arms (the very artisans not excepted), became soldiers; the houses before the town, and especially the cloisters, were pulled down, that the besiegers might not avail themselves of them to cover their attack. The few adherents of the crown, awed by the multitude, were silent; no Roman Catholic ventured to stir himself. Anarchy and rebellion had taken the place of good order, and the fanaticism of a foolhardy priest gave laws instead of the legal dispensers of justice. The male population was numerous, their courage confirmed by despair, their confidence unbounded that the siege would be raised, while their hatred against the Roman Catholic religion was excited to the highest pitch. Many had no mercy to expect; all abhorred the general thraldom of an imperious garrison. Noircarmes, whose army had become formidable through the reinforcements which streamed to it from all quarters, and was abundantly furnished with all the requisites for a long blockade, once more attempted to prevail on the town by gentle means, but in vain. At last he caused the trenches to be opened and prepared to invest the place.

In the meanwhile the position of the Protestants had grown as much worse as that of the regent had improved. The league of the nobles had gradually melted away to a third of its original number. Some of its most important defenders, Count Egmont, for instance, had gone over to the king; the pecuniary contributions which had been so confidently reckoned upon came in but slowly and scantily;

the zeal of the party began perceptibly to cool, and the close of the fine season made it necessary to discontinue the public preachings, which, up to this time, had been continued. These and other reasons combined induced the declining party to moderate its demands, and to try every legal expedient before it proceeded to extremities. In a general synod of the Protestants, which was held for this object in Antwerp, and which was also attended by some of the confederates, it was resolved to send deputies to the regent to remonstrate with her upon this breach of faith, and to remind her of her compact. Brederode undertook this office, but was obliged to submit to a harsh and disgraceful rebuff, and was shut out of Brussels. He had now recourse to a written memorial, in which, — in the name of the whole league, he complained that the duchess had, by violating her word, falsified in sight of all the Protestants the security given by the league, in reliance on which all of them had laid down their arms; that by her insincerity she had undone all the good which the confederates had labored to effect; that she had sought to degrade the league in the eyes of the people, had excited discord among its members, and had even caused many of them to be persecuted as criminals. He called upon her to recall her late ordinances, which deprived the Protestants of the free exercise of their religion, but above all to raise the siege of Valenciennes, to disband the troops newly enlisted, and ended by assuring her that on these conditions and these alone the league would be responsible for the general tranquillity.

To this the regent replied in a tone very different from her previous moderation. "Who these confederates are who address me in this memorial is, indeed, a mystery to me. The confederates with whom I had formerly to do, for ought I know to the contrary, have dispersed. All at least cannot participate in this statement of grievances, for I myself know of many, who, satisfied in all their demands, have returned to their duty. But still, whoever he may be, who without authority and right, and without name addresses me, he has at least given a very false interpretation to my word if he asserts that I guaranteed to the Protestants complete religious liberty. No one can be ignorant how reluctantly I was induced to permit the preachings in the places where they had sprung up unauthorized, and this surely cannot be counted for a concession of freedom in religion. Is it likely that I should have entertained the idea of protecting these illegal consistories, of tolerating this state within a state? Could I forget myself so far as to grant the sanction of law to an objectionable sect; to overturn all order in the church and in the state, and abominably to blaspheme my holy religion? Look to him who has given you such permission, but you must not argue with me. You accuse me of having violated the agreement which gave you impunity and security. The past I am willing to look over, but not what may be done in future. No advantage was to be taken of you on account of the petition of last April, and to the best of my knowledge nothing of the kind has as yet been done; but whoever again offends in the same way against the majesty of the king must be ready to bear the consequences of his crime. In fine, how can you presume to remind me of an agreement which you have been the first to break? At whose instigation were the churches plundered, the images of the saints thrown down, and the towns hurried into rebellion? Who formed alliances with foregn powers, set on foot illegal enlistments, and collected unlawful taxes from the subjects of the king? These are the reasons which have impelled me to draw together my troops, and to increase the severity of the edicts. Whoever now asks me to lay down my arms cannot mean well to his country or his king, and if ye value your own lives, look to it that your own actions acquit you, instead of judging mine."

All the hopes which the confederates might have entertained of an amicable adjustment sank with this high-toned declaration. Without being confident of possessing powerful support, the regent would not, they argued, employ such language. An army was in the field, the enemy was before Valenciennes, the members who were the heart of the league had abandoned it, and the regent required unconditional submission. Their cause was now so bad that open resistance could not make it worse. If they gave themselves up defenceless into the hands of their exasperated sovereign their fate was certain; an appeal to arms could at least make it a matter of doubt; they, therefore, chose the latter, and began seriously to take steps for their defence. In order to insure the assistance of the German

Protestants, Louis of Nassau attempted to persuade the towns of Amsterdam, Antwerp, Tournay, and Valenciennes to adopt the confession of Augsburg, and in this manner to seal their alliance with a religious union. But the proposition was not successful, because the hatred of the Calvinists to the Lutherans exceeded, if possible, that which they bore to popery. Nassau also began in earnest to negotiate for supplies from France, the Palatinate, and Saxony. The Count of Bergen fortified his castles; Brederode threw himself with a small force into his strong town of Vianne on the Leek, over which he claimed the rights of sovereignty, and which he hastily placed in a state of defense, and there awaited a reinforcement from the league, and the issue of Nassua's negotiations. The flag of war was now unfurled, everywhere the drum was heard to beat; in all parts troops were seen on the march, contributions collected, and soldiers enlisted. The agents of each party often met in the same place, and hardly had the collectors and recruiting officers of the regent quitted a town when it had to endure a similar visit from the agents of the league.

From Valenciennes the regent directed her attention to Herzogenbusch, where the Iconoclasts had lately committed fresh excesses, and the party of the Protestants had gained a great accession of strength. In order to prevail on the citizens peaceably to receive a garrison, she sent thither, as ambassador, the Chancellor Scheiff, from Brabant, with counsellor Merode of Petersheim, whom she appointed governor of the town; they were instructed to secure the place by judicious means, and to exact from the citizens a new oath of allegiance. At the same time the Count of Megen, who was in the neighborhood with a body of troops, was ordered to support the two envoys in effecting their commission, and to afford the means of throwing in a garrison immediately. But Brederode, who obtained information of these movements in Viane, had already sent thither one of his creatures, a certain Anton von Bomber, — a hot Calvinist, but also a brave soldier, in order to raise the courage of his party, and to frustrate the designs of the regent. This Bomberg succeeded in getting possession of the letters which the chancellor brought with him from the duchess, and contrived to substitute in their place counterfeit ones, which, by their harsh and imperious language, were calculated to exasperate the minds of the citizens. At the same time he attempted to throw suspicion on both the ambassadors of the duchess as having evil designs upon the town. In this he succeeded so well with the mob that in their mad fury they even laid hands on the ambassadors and placed them in confinement. He himself, at the head of eight thousand men, who had adopted him as their leader, advanced against the Count of Megen, who was moving in order of battle, and gave him so warm a reception, with some heavy artillery, that he was compelled to retire without accomplishing his object. The regent now sent an officer of justice to demand the release of her ambassadors, and in case of refusal to threaten the place with siege; but Bomberg with his party surrounded the town hall and forced the magistrate to deliver to him the key of the town. The messenger of the regent was ridiculed and dismissed, and an answer sent through him that the treatment of the prisoners would depend upon Brederode's orders. The herald, who was remaining outside before the town, now appeared to declare war against her, which, however, the chancellor prevented.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.