spirit overcame their patriotism. It must indeed be admitted that towns, where the popular government held the balance true between the crafts, were very rare. Nearly always the more powerful groups abused their power, and imposed their wishes on the weaker "members."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE URBAN DEMOCRACIES AND THE STATE.

I. Relations between the Towns and the Princes before the Burgundian Period.—II. The Conflict between the Municipalities and the Monarchy in the 15th Century.

I.

Relations between the Towns and the Princes before the Burgundian Period.

In all the countries of western Europe, the governing bodies of the municipalities of the Middle Ages were animated by a more or less active republican sentiment. It could not well have been otherwise. For the economic exclusiveness of the burghers, as well as their social development, necessarily drove them to achieve complete autonomy, to deal with their affairs in their own way and, in short, to transform themselves into a "state within the state." These tendencies, already very marked in the patrician period, became more pronounced under democratic administration, which in this respect continued the tradition of the government that had been overthrown. In France and England the royal power was strong enough to oppose, from the first, the efforts of the towns and later to triumph over them. In Italy and Germany,

on the other hand, the weakness of the central authority condemned it to yield, and a flourishing crop of free towns soon grew up on both sides of the Alps. The Low Countries show us an intermediate position. Though the great communes reached a high degree of independence, they never succeeded, in spite of all their efforts, in completely emancipating themselves from the authority of their princes. They did not become states within the state; they remained part of the territorial principalities from which they wished to escape. Though they were the most vigorous elements in these states, though they won the first place in them and had a preponderating importance, though their autonomy and liberty of action are in the strongest contrast with the ever-increasing subordination to the crown of the English and French towns, yet they never succeeded in crossing the line. They differed both from the free imperial towns of the empire, and the municipal republics of Tuscany, and from the communes of France under the strict superintendence of the king's provosts and bailiffs.

Their power and wealth easily explain why they did not share the fate of the French towns. But how was it that they did not succeed in acquiring the status of the German and Tuscan cities? Why did not Liége, for instance, which was in no way inferior to the episcopal cities of Germany in population or resources, reach that position of holding immediately of the emperor which so many of them attained? Above all, how was it that Ghent and Bruges, which dared to provoke the king of France to a quarrel and which succeeded in holding their own against him

at the beginning of the 14th century, could not shake off the supremacy of their immediate lord, the count of Flanders?

It is not difficult to answer this question.

A municipal republic did not, as a matter of fact, enjoy an absolute independence when it had thrown off its allegiance to its immediate lord. It only escaped the power of the count or bishop by putting itself under the direct power of the higher suzerain. The German town was only free in the sense that it exchanged the neighbouring and very active authority of its lord for the distant and very feeble authority of the emperor. But by the 14th century the emperor had become a foreigner in the Low Countries. His suzerainty over the countries on the right bank of the Scheldt was merely nominal. No one, either in Holland, Brabant, Hainault, or in the bishopric of Liége, thought any longer of asking for his intervention. This is proved in a striking manner by the action of the towns of the bishopric of Liége during the fiercest of their contests with bishop Adolph de la Mark. Instead of citing him before Louis of Bavaria, who would not have lost the opportunity of pronouncing in their favour, and, in default of effective assistance, would at least have granted them writs which they could have used to justify their conduct, the towns addressed ineffective appeals to the pope. They disregarded the only authority capable of furnishing them with a legal right to oppose the claims of their bishop. It never occurred to them to use their only opportunity of raising themselves to the rank of free towns. Clearly this was due to the fact that the consciousness of belonging to the empire was

gone, and that henceforth the horizon of their political life was bounded by the narrow limits of their bishop's principality.

Instead of a nominal suzerainty like the emperor's, the power exercised in Flanders by the king of France was real and very active. The towns in conflict with Guy of Dampierre did not fail to profit by it. We have seen how they placed themselves under the protection of the crown [1] in order to secure a safeguard against the count. For the moment they were dependent only on the royal jurisdiction and enjoyed a position analogous to that of the free towns of Germany. But the democratic revolution of 1302, which overthrew the patrician *Leliaerts*, also broke the ties which had just been formed between the house of Capet and the communes. These ties were never subsequently re-established. After the definitive peace between Flanders and France, the kings no longer sought the alliance of the towns. Their policy was henceforth to conciliate the count, and in order to attach him to their cause, they lent him their assistance to suppress the rebellions of the towns. It was thanks to the French armies that Louis of Nevers in 1328, and Louis of Mâle in 1380, were able to triumph over the two most formidable urban revolts known in the history of the Low Countries. Thus the weakness of the suzerain in the bishopric of Liége and his power in the county of Flanders had the same result. Both ended by benefitting the prince. The emperor by not using his influence on behalf of the towns, the king by exerting his influence against them after helping them for a time, hindered them from attaining

1. See p. 144.

the political independence at which they aimed. In spite of the heroism displayed by the towns, the princes in the end carried the day.

Further it must not be forgotten that municipal exclusiveness not only forbade the towns to unite in a common effort but also aroused the opposition of all the interests threatened by such narrowness. The nobles and the clergy made common cause with the prince in resisting the encroachments of the burghers. The cause of the towns was at bottom only the cause of a privileged group, whose victory would have meant its overwhelming supremacy and would have been injurious to everyone outside it. The particularism of the towns came into collision with other privileged interests. It was unable to break up the framework of the territorial state, and was forced, whether it pleased or not, to find a place within it.

The towns at least succeeded in winning a paramount place in the organization of the state. If, in the social hierarchy, the third estate yielded precedence to the clergy and the nobility, in all the principalities of the Low Countries, its political power surpassed that of both the other estates. In Flanders, Brabant, Holland and the bishopric of Liége, its influence in the provincial law courts and estates was infinitely greater than that of the other two orders. The privileges granted to the different subdivisions of the Netherlands allowed a preponderating position to the towns. In Brabant, the "Charter of Cortenberg" (1312) set up a council of government in which, by the side of four knights, sat ten representatives of the towns. In the bishopric of Liége, the court of the XXII, established in 1373 to keep a close watch over

the officers of the bishop, consisted of four canons, four nobles and fourteen burghers. In the constitution of the county of Flanders, the town became the dominating element. The three great towns of Ghent, Bruges and Ypres arrogated to themselves the right to represent the whole country and, under the name of the three "members" of Flanders, seized, for their own benefit, after the middle of the 14th century, the power which elsewhere belonged to the local estates as a whole.

In truth, strange as it may seem at first sight, it was the growth of the princely power that first gave to the towns a real opportunity of sharing in the government of the counties and duchies in which they were locally situated. From the time when the revenues of their demesne lands no longer sufficed to defray the expenses necessitated by their policy and their administration, the princes found they were bound to call upon their subjects to add to their resources. The towns, being richer than the clergy and the nobility, paid a larger contribution, but they demanded in return for their services concessions which could not be refused. Nevertheless, in coming to the help of their counts and bishops, they were on the whole strengthening a power which was incompatible with municipal self-government. For, from the end of the 13th century, the princes clearly and constantly tended to increase their prerogatives, and to concentrate in their hands as much authority as they could. The lawyers with whom they surrounded themselves, after the example of Philip the Fair, never dreamt of any government which was not despotic in character. They soon taught their princely patrons

to follow in the steps of the French kings. In Hainault, Albert of Bavaria tried to introduce a salt tax in 1364 and, under his successor, the lawyer, Philip of Leyden, wrote a manual of statecraft, in which the theory of absolute sovereignty was enunciated without any reservations. In Flanders especially, new institutions sprang up which increased the growing centralization and involved the steady extension of the idea of "lordship." The principle that the prince's will had the force of law became more and more universally accepted.

So long as the different territories of the Low Countries were independent of one another, and had each its own reigning house, the power of the prince nowhere became absolute. But when the house of Burgundy had succeeded in bringing under its control the small feudal states of Flanders and Lorraine, a monarchical policy could develop itself with tenfold vigour owing to its increased resources. Under Philip the Good (1419—1467) the work of unification was completed; the Burgundian state made the greater part of the Netherlands something of a unity, and acquired the centralizing institutions indispensable to the maintenance of such a policy.

II.

The Conflict between the Municipalities and the Monarchy in the 15th Century.

While in France and England the modern state found its chief adversaries in the great nobles, in the Low Countries it was the towns that hindered its progress. The more the old system had favoured

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While in France and England the modern state found its chief adversaries in the great nobles, in the Low Countries it was the towns that hindered its progress. The more the old system had favoured

them, the more desperately they defended it. Force was in the end needed to overcome their resistance.

Nothing could be more mistaken than to see in Philip the Good, as has too often been the case, the mortal foe of the great towns, a tyrant determined upon their ruin and seeking every opportunity to injure them. Philip was fully conscious that his power and position in Europe depended on the riches of the Low Countries. He knew that their prosperity was too intimately bound up with that of the townsfolk for him to think of injuring them. The real truth is that his policy of centralization was incompatible with municipal self-government as understood by the Middle Ages. The sovereignty of the state could not give way before municipal privileges. It was bound to bring the towns under the ordinary law and to sacrifice their particular interests to those of the state as a whole. In combating the prerogatives of the towns, the prince was evidently doing what was best for himself. Yet at the same time he was also acting for the advantage of the great majority of his subjects. He considered his "supremacy" and his "lordship" as the guarantee of "public welfare" and thus justified his claim to obedience. Henceforth the great communes ceased to exist as so many immunities beyond the reach of the central power. The prince shared with them the nomination of their magistrates, audited their accounts by his own officers, prevented them from exploiting the small towns and the peasants, forbade them to fill his dominions with their "foreign burghers," and compelled them, whether they liked it or not, to acquiesce in the right of appeal from the municipal courts to his own supreme tribunal.

It is important to notice that the prince achieved his end without any great difficulty. It is clear that the privileges the towns claimed to uphold against him, had had their day and were doomed to disappear. Everybody, except the burghers themselves, was eager to get rid of municipal immunities, for they had now become an obstacle to the new forces, which, since the beginning of the 15th century, exercised a growing influence upon economic development. The progress of capitalism, of navigation and the means of communication in general, demanded the abolition of the impediments that the policy of the towns threw in the way of freedom. Henceforward commerce on a large scale was brought into conflict with the restrictive economic ideals of the towns, just as the towns themselves had, in their infancy, been confronted by the incompatible manorial economics of feudalism. Foreign trade demanded the abolition of the privileged markets, the staples, and other industrial monopolies. It also required a single code of law binding on the whole state, and therefore the suppression of municipal franchises which had become a hindrance to liberty.

The burghers, who had long enjoyed a privileged position, were naturally bent upon defending it. Instead of adapting themselves to the needs of the time, they remained obstinately devoted to the past. If foreign competition interfered with their export trade, they did not make the slightest effort to win it back by overhauling their methods of manufacture; they saw no hope of safety but in increased protection. In the midst of the changes which were taking place around them, they preserved their unshaken confidence in the mediæval legislation that had created

their greatness. They thought that a loss of their outworn privileges would lead inevitably to their "total destruction and destitution." They did not admit that those hopelessly antiquated franchises only constituted so many stumbling blocks to commercial activity. Bruges might see the merchants abandon her for Antwerp; Dordrecht might note the steady growth of the port of Amsterdam; but neither would understand that their privileges, by turning away the stranger from their marts, were the real cause of their decay. Experience taught them nothing, and they remained deaf to the voice of councillors who predicted that, in acting as they were doing, "they would utterly destroy their existing trade."

It is then certain that, in their conflict with the towns, the Burgundian princes were on the whole acting in the interests of the public. They rallied round them not only the clergy, the nobility and the peasants, but also that class of new men, who, in the 15th century, were beginning to develop a system of trade under which capitalism secured the freest expansion. Furthermore, within the towns themselves, a considerable party of the rich burghers pronounced for the princes. In increasing numbers the better class of townsfolk began to abandon commerce and to seek in the service of the state an honourable and lucrative career. Hampered by the exclusive spirit of the crafts and disturbed by the slackening of the industry of the towns, the sons of the patricians thronged into the liberal professions or took up official careers. New institutions created by the centralized monarchy, courts of justice, departments of finance and administrative offices of every kind, drew them away from

municipal politics and bound them to the service of the prince who paid them. For the same reason that, during the Burgundian period, the nobility transformed itself by degrees into a nobility of courtiers, the upper class in the towns now provided the prince with an assured supply of recruits for the administrative offices which were continually multiplying owing to the growth of his power.

To counterbalance so many circumstances unfavourable to their cause, it was now imperative that the towns should help one another. But that was just what their exclusive absorption in local and class interests prevented. They failed to combine or to come to an understanding with each other. Jealousy caused them to abandon one another in the hour of peril. In 1437 Bruges found herself deserted by all Flanders in the struggle with Philip the Good. In 1452 Ghent experienced the same fate. With the exception of Ninove, all the towns of the surrounding district abandoned it at the critical moment. In spite of entreaties the other "members" of the county confined themselves to offering the rebels their good offices in reconciling them with the duke. In such a state of affairs it is not astonishing that in the reign of Philip the Good, the traditional conflict between the towns and the state came almost everywhere to an end.

Liége, it is true, fought against the duke of Burgundy with incredible desperation and, as is well known, paid for its heroic obstinacy against Charles the Bold by its utter destruction. But Liége was not a Burgundian town. It was not fighting solely for its franchises, but for its independence in secular matters of the ecclesiastical principality of which it was the

capital, and it had on its side the whole population of the bishopric. Liége saw in the house of Burgundy a conqueror and a foreigner, even more than an enemy of municipal privilege. Above all it must not be forgotten that the interference of the French king explains both the boldness of the town and the harshness with which it was treated by its conqueror.

In no part of their own lands did the dukes of Burgundy act with the cruelty shewn towards Liége. Moreover it was only in Flanders, that is to say in the country where the towns enjoyed the most extensive privileges and had also encroached most boldly on the prerogatives of the prince, that the Burgundian dukes had to take arms against the burghers. The rising at Bruges in 1436—1437 was not indeed very formidable. But Ghent did not hesitate to confront its sovereign with that remarkable dourness and tenacity of which its history furnishes so many examples. Thanks to the number of its "foreign burghers," to the peasants whom it enrolled by force and to the English mercenaries whom it hired, the powerful commune was able to hold the blockading forces in check for more than a year. But, in spite of all their courage, its militia could no longer meet a regular army in a pitched battle. The progress of the art of war gave to these craftsmen turned soldiers no chance of victory. The bloody defeat they suffered at Gavere, on July 23rd, 1453, at the hands of Philip's Picard and Burgundian veterans, shewed in unmistakable fashion the hopeless weakness of the military system of the communes.

Ghent did not, as after Roosebeke, attempt to continue a hopeless resistance. On July 30th two

thousand of her burghers came and knelt in their shirts before duke Philip and begged for mercy. They undertook to pay an indemnity of 350,000 gold *ridders* and, in token of submission, to wall up one of the town gates and to keep another shut every Thursday. This atonement to the prince's offended majesty was, moreover, only the least part of the punishment. Ghent, like Bruges in 1437, had to renounce its almost absolute independence and the supremacy over its neighbours which it had till then enjoyed. All customs contrary to the letter of its charters were abolished. The deans of the three "members," the crafts, the *poorters* and the weavers, ceased to have any voice in the election of magistrates; the count's steward recovered control over the administration of the town; the privileges of the "foreign burghers" were curtailed; the *échevins* lost all right to call before them a law suit in which a burgher was involved, if he were willing to accept a jurisdiction other than that of the commune; and finally and above all, the small towns and the villages of the *châtellenie* were withdrawn from the power of Ghent. Thus Ghent was in its turn brought under the ordinary law. Robbed of its lordship and of the franchises which it had added in such numbers to its legal privileges, it was now simply just like any other town and was reduced to the level of its fellows. Still, it was only the political privileges which were abolished by the duke; he did not deprive Ghent of its right to the staple, nor did he interfere with its municipal self-government. He even helped it to repair the misfortunes of the war by granting it, only a few weeks after the battle of Gavere, the right to hold two fairs.

This circumstance may be regarded as quite characteristic of the duke's policy towards the towns. Philip made no attempt to impose an arbitrary government upon them. He allowed the local government, which had grown up in the towns, to remain. He respected the liberties granted by his predecessors. Above all he avoided arousing discontent by any untimely or meddlesome interference. He took care to choose from nobles or officials, acquainted with local manners and customs, the "commissioners," who represented him when the yearly appointment of the magistrates was made, and their accounts audited. In most respects, moreover, the intervention of his commissioners was distinctly beneficial. After examining the recommendations made by them, and entered in the communal registers, it is impossible not to appreciate the conscientiousness with which they nearly all set themselves to accomplish their task. Many useless expenses were suppressed, many abuses abolished; and many beneficial reforms were brought about by them in the municipal finances.

The Burgundian government tried hard to discover remedies for the economic decay due, in most of the towns of Flanders, to the dwindling of the cloth industry. In the interests of the towns the importation of cloth and yarn from England was forbidden. The efforts of Bruges to prevent the silting up of the Zwyn were encouraged. Everything possible was done to help the development of the Antwerp fairs. The towns of Holland were assisted in their conflict with the Hansa, and thanks to this they succeeded in appropriating the carrying trade of their opponents. In the crisis, brought about by alterations in the course

of trade, which had left Bruges on one side, and by English competition, which was ruining the Flemish cloth industry, the state spared no effort to help the distressed communes. But clearly it could not save them in spite of themselves. The narrowness of municipal policy often dictated to the central authority measures which it would certainly never have taken if left to itself. Pulled in different directions by towns whose interests were incompatible, the state did not always see the path clear before it; it hesitated, felt its way, and often made contradictory decisions. We find the duke maintaining Bruges in her staple rights, and at the same time encouraging the growth of the Antwerp fairs, which were ruining the old commercial monopolies. In Flanders, to satisfy Ypres, he repressed the rural cloth manufacture in the neighbourhood of that town, though elsewhere he authorized and protected it. We see from this hesitating policy, that, influenced alike by the tendencies of the past and those of the future, he was unable to take up a clear line of his own. He attempted the impossible feat of reconciling the new capitalism "which always seeks liberty" with the old municipal protection. The one end that the Burgundian policy was resolutely bent upon accomplishing was the subordination of the towns to the superior power of the prince, that is, to the state.

The new official system of centralization also provided a considerable number of towns with fresh resources and contributed to reconcile them to the new administration which had been imposed upon them. The establishment of a university at Louvain in 1426, of supreme courts of justice at Ghent, Brussels and Mechlin, of financial chambers at Lille, Brussels

and the Hague, caused the establishment in those places of numerous officials, lawyers, and subordinate employees of all kinds. Students, suitors, and officials of the revenue departments flocked to the same towns. Both the new residents and the new floating population were a constant source of abundant profit to the inhabitants. Thus the civil administration contributed in its turn to the maintenance of the life of the towns by the creation of great institutions involving a large resident population engaged in serving them, such as the ecclesiastical authorities had alone possessed up to that time. These processes kept up town life, but changed its character. The residence of a large body of officers of the state in the very midst of the burghers necessarily diminished municipal exclusiveness. When they were always in touch with the general organization of the country, the towns could no longer regard themselves as little worlds apart. They felt that they were elements of a larger whole and that, instead of initiating policy, they were bound to follow where they were led. However suspicious of the state the small burghers were, they put up with it because they feared it and even profited by it. As for the wealthy classes, we have already said that they made haste to benefit by their opportunities, and to transfer to the service of the state an activity which till then had only been exercised within the narrow limits of municipal politics.

It is true that these changes were not carried through without resistance. After the death of Philip the Good (1467), the haughty absolutism of Charles the Bold seriously threatened the results already attained. When Charles was still only count of Charolais, he

one day boasted before the people of Brussels that "by St. George, if he ever became their duke, he would let them know it and they should not act towards him as they had towards his father, who had been too easy with them, had enriched them, and made them the proud men they were."

Charles kept his word precisely. The sack of Liége taught the towns that they now had a pitiless master, "who preferred their hatred to their contempt." The prince overrode at his pleasure the municipal self-government that Philip had respected. Ancient customs, established rights and deep-rooted privileges were trampled under foot. At Ghent, the election of *échevins* was handed over entirely to the duke's commissioners; the three "members" into which the townsmen were divided, were abolished; for the future the whole of the inhabitants were to form, at his will, "only one body and community." In Holland, Charles claimed for himself the nomination of the municipal magistrates. His arbitrary and levelling radicalism thought for a moment of substituting at Liége the scientific rigour of Roman law for the old local customs. A despot by nature he was still more so by conviction. He sincerely believed that the absolute power of the sovereign was the sole guarantee of order and of that stern and equal justice, which he claimed to have enthroned in his dominions. But his internal government met with the same fate as his foreign policy. His pride and unreasonable obstinacy ruined both alike. The catastrophe which befel Charles before the walls of Nancy (1477), gave the signal for a particularist reaction that all but destroyed the state created by Philip the Good.

The more rigorously the despotism of the dukes had justified by the common law its intolerable encroachments, the more the towns sought to regain their privileges. All the great communes hastened to profit by the annihilation of the ducal army and the disorder of their young princess's[1] affairs to re-establish their franchises and to revive their ancient methods of government. Everywhere the crafts took up arms, and democratic government was set up again, just as it had existed in the 14th century. But its success lasted only a moment. Hardly was it restored when its powerlessness was apparent. The old spirit of municipal particularism soon let loose once more the old spirit of universal rivalry. The country districts and the small towns, falling once more under the yoke of the great communes, declared against them. Bruges and Ghent excited the ill-will of Antwerp, whose development was threatened by their policy of protection. Accordingly Antwerp at once went back to the side of the prince. The towns of Holland, which in great measure owed their growing maritime supremacy to Burgundian policy, also abandoned their opposition after the first moment of excitement. Flanders alone refused to lay down her arms. The stronger and more privileged the towns of Flanders had been in times past, the less capable they were of understanding the necessity for reconciling their interests with those of the state.

The crafts of the Flemish towns perceived that their forces were not strong enough to give them the victory. Recalling the action of the *Leliaerts* in 1302,

1. Charles left as his heir his only child, Mary of Burgundy, then aged twenty.

they turned to the king of France. They summoned Louis XI. to their rescue, just as their ancient enemies appealed to Philip the Fair for aid against the crafts. The democracy sought the same support as the decaying patriciate, the help of the foreigner. French mercenaries arrived to do the fighting on its behalf, for the communal militia confined itself to keeping watch on the ramparts and did not venture to meet regular troops in the open field. The war was clumsily conducted by Maximilian of Austria, who had married Mary of Burgundy in August 1477; accordingly it dragged on for a long time with vicissitudes on which we need not now dwell. The obstinacy of Ghent prolonged hostilities until 1492, even after all chance of success had vanished. Maximilian was a foreigner, and he showed a lack of intelligence in parading an absolutism modelled on that of Charles the Bold. He quarrelled with a large number of the nobles after the death of Mary; his resources were scanty; he was frequently absent in Germany, where he had been elected king of the Romans in 1486. These circumstances sufficiently explain the length of the resistance offered by Ghent, notwithstanding the fact that France was a long way off and supported the townsmen with no great energy. In reality outside Flanders, and even in Flanders outside Ghent, the partisans of the old municipal policy and of the urban democracy by which it was supported, were only a feeble minority. Ghent herself gradually abandoned its principles. Under the domination of the demagogue John of Coppenhole, formerly clerk to the *échevins*, who had risen to power during the troubles, the burgesses lived in a state of anarchy and violence against which, ultimately, a large

part of the burghers rose in revolt. The craft of the boatmen, the most influential of the trade guilds since the decline of the cloth trade had robbed the weavers of all their influence, demanded the end of a ruinous and aimless war. To secure his position, Coppenhole had their leader beheaded and pitted against them the lesser crafts, whose extreme industrial particularism was the mainstay of extreme municipal particularism. A shoemaker became captain-general of the commune. But the boatmen rebelled, and Coppenhole in his turn mounted the scaffold. After that, peace was only a question of days. It was concluded at Cadzand on July 29th 1492, and brought Ghent back to the state of things set up within its walls after the peace of Gavere.

With the capitulation of the most indomitable of the towns, the period of municipal wars in the Low Countries came to an end. The accession of Philip the Handsome, the son of Mary of Burgundy and Maximilian, in 1494, gave power to a national prince, and soothed public feeling. Thus the triumph of the state put an end to the conflict which had raged for more than a century between the state and the communes, the state standing for the modern principle of centralized monarchy and the communes for the mediæval principle of particularist autonomy. But that triumph did not crush the towns beneath an absolute government. They still had strength enough, if not to contend with the state, yet at any rate to exercise a great influence in its affairs, and to insist upon due regard for their interests and wishes.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TOWNS DURING THE RENAISSANCE.

I. The Economic Revolution and its Influence on the Government of the Towns.—II. The Population of the Towns during the 16th Century.—III. The Rising at Ghent against Charles V.

I.

The Economic Revolution and its Influence on the Government of the Towns.

Since the beginning of the Burgundian period, political, economic and social changes had little by little modified the position of the Netherlandish towns, had radically altered their commerce and manufactures and changed the nature of their population. These changes not only provoked the struggle with the prince but also decided its issue. They were so rapidly and clearly marked in the first years of the 16th century that, after the reign of Philip the Handsome, the burghers found themselves face to face with a state of affairs completely different from every point of view from that which had, during four centuries, determined their interests, aims and institutions. To begin with, from the political point of view the sovereign had, by alliances and by good fortune in marriage treaties, gained a power that rendered him the mightiest ruler in Europe, against whom it was impossible to rebel.

Charles V, the son and successor of Philip the Handsome, became master of Spain, Milan, the kingdom of Naples, the domains of the house of Austria, and the empire; he aspired to universal dominion, and the provinces of his Netherlandish patrimony, administered in his name by governors (Margaret of Austria and then Mary of Burgundy), were obedient to his orders, being only too pleased with the internal self-government which he allowed them to enjoy. Charles cleverly avoided ruffling the old national traditions or, by a crushing absolutism, sowing a discontent that could not failed to be turned to advantage by his rival, the king of France. Furthermore, in spite of their small area, the Low Countries possessed such wealth that the emperor's credit was in a large measure dependent upon them. It was important, then, for him to humour them.

Indeed the peace enjoyed by the Netherlands, under Philip the Handsome, after the civil broils of Maximilian's reign, had not only restored prosperity but had carried it to a point never reached before. The admirable position of the country, which, in the Middle Ages, had made it the centre of the commerce of the north, gave it, in the world widened by the discoveries of the Spaniards and the Portuguese, a correspondingly widened economic importance. From the beginning of the 16th century, Antwerp became the warehouse of the world's carrying trade. The influence that it acquired, between about 1520 and 1580, has never belonged to any town before or since. Never has any port possessed such an exclusive supremacy, exercised so strong an attraction and displayed such a cosmopolitan character. It presented a unique spectacle during

those years of astonishing progress when, by extraordinary good fortune, it was at once the greatest market and the greatest banking centre of the world. Ships and capital were drawn to the town; all languages could be heard there. By her beauty as well as by her wealth, Antwerp deserved to be called one of the flowers of the world; her prosperity made the Low Countries "a land common to all nations." As a necessary result of her pre-eminence, all the surrounding provinces followed the lead of Antwerp; she communicated to them her activity, permeated them with her spirit and hastened the transition from the economic methods of the Middle Ages to those of modern times.

The most striking feature of the modern system is, as is generally recognized, the preponderance of capital. The rise of a capitalist class was encouraged all over Europe by the development of strong monarchies, based upon centralized institutions, by the growing financial needs of the chief states, which kept pace with the increasing frequency of war, and by the general spread of the machinery and instruments of credit, by geographical discoveries, by the advance of science, by the growth of a spirit of enterprise and, finally, by the moral upheaval of the Renaissance. All these conditions favoured the growth of a class of bold adventurers, great merchants, bankers and speculators, as keenly devoted to the search for wealth as was the humanist to the knowledge of the wisdom of antiquity, and as devoid of scruple as a diplomatist trained in the school of Machiavelli. As a result of their activity, economic history developed on the same lines as the history of art. The contrast between the

new capitalists and the patricians of the Middle Ages is as striking as that between Fra Angelico and Raphael, or between Van Eyck and Frans Floris. The capital they controlled was infinitely greater than that of the ancient *poorters*, and they dealt in a market of infinitely greater extent. Again, they did not spring from the ranks of the old burgher merchants. These merchants, when they felt the effect of the economic revolution, were either ruined or changed by degrees into a class of men of private means, or they became officials or lawyers. The "new men" of the Renaissance were in fact adventurers. They had no ancestors, no family traditions, and their fierce eagerness to acquire riches manifested itself with that peculiar intensity and vigour which characterize all the new forces set free at that passionate period.

From every quarter men of this stamp were drawn towards Antwerp by a natural impulse, as the *conquistadors* of their time were drawn to the New World. They hurried from Germany, Italy, Spain and the provinces of the Low Countries, to try their fortunes as brokers, banking agents, exporters, commission agents or speculators. The more fortunate soon accumulated immense wealth, while others were overwhelmed by crashing failures. They lived a feverish life, subject to all the chance ups and downs caused by war, by the cornering of goods and the fluctuations of the money market. In proportion as economic life in the Middle Ages had been regulated, supervised, sheltered from free competition and partitioned into local compartments and professional groups which were protected against one another, in that degree it now expanded, contemning the old barriers and honoured

usages, unfettered, unscrupulous and pitiless. The liberal and capitalist character that it gave to the commerce of Antwerp necessarily spread abroad, and we soon find the industry of the Low Countries modified by its influence.

From the beginning of the 16th century, the market of Antwerp absorbed the greater part of the produce of the Low Countries. Antwerp gave the orders, and became more and more the source of the prosperity of the whole country. Bruges, still faithful to her obsolete legal rights, protested in vain against the flagrant violation of her staple privileges. Her port was deserted. The more she clamoured to attract merchants, the more they gave her a wide berth and turned towards her younger rival, where the principle of commercial liberty had gained the victory over privilege and monopoly. The town crafts in their turn vainly endeavoured to struggle against a position before which they were as powerless as the communal levies had been before regular armies. Their decadence grew more marked from year to year. The towns of Flanders and Brabant had in vain persuaded the dukes of Burgundy to prohibit the importation of English stuffs, the cheapness of which gave them admittance despite all efforts. Thousands of pieces of English kerseys were unloaded on the quays of Antwerp every year, though ruin was falling on the cloth trade of the Netherlands. In 1545 at Ypres "the business of the drapery trade was so fallen off and diminished" that only about a hundred looms were still working. At Ghent in 1543 the looms numbered no more than twenty-five. The same state of things was to be found in Brabant. At Brussels in 1537

there were no blue dyers left. The promise of a subsidy of 600 florins was needed to draw one of them to the town.

This decline was fatal. To maintain itself in the face of a strenuous competition, encouraged by the commercial interests of Antwerp, the ancient cloth manufacture in the Netherlandish towns would have had to renounce entirely its old-fashioned organization, abandon the processes which the practice of centuries had made habitual, and sacrifice to industrial necessities its traditional claim to absolute protection and all the other consequences of a legal position made for a dead epoch. But how could the artisans be expected to break with methods which to them seemed bound up with their existence? Could they get beyond the narrow horizon which had limited their view for so many centuries? There could be no doubt as to their answer. In fact, the government of the crafts could only have been overturned by a violent revolution, by a complete rearrangement of the whole system of municipal government. This was too old, too deeply rooted in tradition and use to make its modification possible. Accordingly the mediæval municipal system went on vegetating and collapsed in slow decay. All the measures taken to help it failed.

In contrast with the drapery trade in the towns, the cloth manufacture in the country districts entered upon a career of astonishing progress. Reduced, during the whole of the Middle Ages, to a precarious and miserable existence by the jealously guarded privileges of the towns, it had begun to expand here and there during the Burgundian period, in spite of many

difficulties and constant complaints. Then suddenly, towards the end of the first third of the 16th century, it became very prosperous. The result was the growth of a new system of industry, fundamentally different from the old corporate organization, which still existed side by side with it, and as well adapted to the new economic order as the guild system was incompatible with it. Free from all the fetters with which municipal regulation had narrowly confined the artisan, the new development answered all the requirements of capitalist enterprise. Under the new conditions there were no limits to the output, no crafts uniting the artisans against the employer, interfering with the rate of wages, fixing the conditions of apprenticeship and limiting the hours of work. Above all there were no privileges restricting admission to the trade to burghers only, and excluding "foreigners," as all new burghers had long been styled. Here every man was sure of being employed, provided he was able-bodied and knew how to throw a shuttle. No one troubled about his past or where he came from, while the man himself, treating with his employer as an isolated individual, perforce submitted to the terms imposed upon him by the master, since he was only too thankful to have found a means of earning his bread. Thus in the villages round Ypres, in the castelry of Bailleul, at Bergues-Saint-Winnoc, in the neighbourhood of Lille, but above all at Hondschoote and Armentières, there arose a real industrial proletariate. Miserable wretches and vagabonds drifted there from all parts of the country. More than that, the evil plight of industry in the towns drove the workpeople of the great communes into the open country

and caused the strange sight of an exodus from the towns into the villages. In short, in order to compete with English cloth, the Low Countries had to undergo a transformation similar to that which had taken place in England itself. The contrast between the young industrial communities of the 16th century, and the old towns, recalls a like contrast between privileged boroughs, like Worcester and Evesham, and the manufacturing towns of Manchester, Sheffield and Birmingham, which then begin for the first time to claim a place for themselves in history.

Naturally the "new cloth trade" worked for the Antwerp market; from there came the orders to complete hundreds or even thousands of pieces for a single merchant. Moreover the same thing happened in the case of many other industries which were called into existence in the same way by capitalism and economic freedom. A great development of the iron industry and of coal-mining in the provinces of Liége, Namur and Hainault, went on independently of the town crafts, under the conditions of the common law, and directed by individual enterprise. There too the industrial proletariate first appeared in the country districts.

This social system spread immediately to the towns. If the crafts kept a jealous eye on the old industries and thereby doomed them to stagnation, they could not hinder the introduction of manufactures unknown to the Middle Ages, or subject them to their regulations. The capitalists did not neglect the opportunity of profiting from these circumstances. During the first half of the 16th century, the weaving of satin and baize and of twilled material, the

making of ribbons and glass-blowing, were introduced in several ancient municipalities. Thus the new organization made its way into the towns alongside the privileged corporations. At Valenciennes, for example, the manufacture of serges was started by wealthy capitalist employers. Most of the workmen employed by the trade came from the neighbouring villages, whither they returned on Saturday evening, to pass the Sunday with their families and to take home the scanty wage which they had earned by working in the town all the week. Carpet-making and the linen industry also show us the crafts retreating before the invading force of capital. In spite of the outcries of the town artisans, free labour, that is to say country labour, was almost exclusively employed. Carpet-making occupied thousands of weavers throughout Flanders. The linen industry was carried on with vigour in a great number of parishes round Oudenarde. The little family workshops, in groups of thirty to sixty under the direction of *winkelmeesters* (workshop masters), were at the disposal of the employers in the towns. Every Sunday the work done during the week was taken to them and exchanged for the raw material to be worked up during the following week.

II.

The Population of the Towns in the 16th Century.

It was necessary to describe in some detail the economic movements of the 16th century in order to make intelligible the changes through which the burgher class passed at that period. We have said enough on

that subject to show how different was the position of the privileged municipalities henceforward from what it had been in the Middle Ages. They had lost the monopoly of industry. The progress of capitalism, as well as progress in methods of manufacture, had made it impossible for them to maintain unchanged a system of regulations which only suited the needs of a period that had passed away. It is true that this system had not entirely perished. The policy of protection for the burgher tradesmen still governed all that had to do with the food supply in the local market. The crafts busied with the feeding of the population still held their privileged place. Butchers, bakers, smiths, joiners, shoemakers, etc., continued to possess the sole rights of supplying the daily needs of the burghers. Driven out of the great industries by the country workmen, the crafts were all the more eager to retain their remaining sphere of operations. With that end in view their regulations multiplied and constantly increased in minuteness. The corporations jealously shared out among each other the narrow area that was still under their control. Each craft spied upon its neighbours, and the least transgression of the rights of one of them was the signal for interminable law suits. Between the turners and the joiners, the coopers and the carpenters, the leather workers and the harness makers, in short, between all the groups of artisans who lived on the local market, litigation was incessant. At the same time every craft withdrew into its shell and became less and less accessible to new-comers. The rank of master workman tended to become hereditary, and simple journeymen could seldom attain it, placed as it

was beyond their reach by the exorbitant fines which had to be paid before it could be gained.

Little by little the craft guilds of each district became divided into two distinct groups: an upper group, which was practically a civic aristocracy, making plentiful and easy profits under the shelter of protection; the lower, a class of domestic workers, sharing the work of their masters, well treated by them as a rule, but deprived of any hope of ever improving their condition. The social aspect of the guilds, entering upon a new phase, lost all the vigour and energy it had shown in the Middle Ages. The masters, attending only to their own interests, tried to evade the expenses entailed by keeping up the corporate life of these societies. It was often necessary for the state to interfere and compel them to accept the office of *reward* or *vinder*. Most of the crafts were in debt; their ancient charities were maintained with difficulty. On the other hand their political privileges were useless except to the masters. The masters monopolized the representation of the craft guilds in all their dealings with the municipal authorities. To use an expression as exact as it is undignified, we may say that they only used their privileges in the spirit of hucksters.

In opposition to these ancient bodies, petrified in privilege, the workers in the new industries in the towns affected by the action of capitalism, began to show a constantly increasing activity, and an energy which kept pace with the progress of the export trade. Between their position and that of the crafts we find once more, but in a very different form, the contrast already noticed in the Middle Ages between the

artisans engaged in the cloth manufacture and those occupied in other callings. Mere wage-earners, like the fullers and weavers of former times, these workmen enjoyed no rights of corporate life such as their predecessors had possessed. They were exposed without redress to the exploitation of their employers. The state and the municipality, so careful of the smaller trades, abandoned them to their fate. If the public authority interfered on their behalf, it was only with the object of reorganizing their charities. This circumstance in itself throws a strong light on the miserable condition to which they were reduced. A large number of the craftsmen were only beggars working under compulsion, or the children of beggars, whom the funds of the new charitable societies had apprenticed to some craft. Others, as we have seen above, came from the country to hire out their labour in the town, and did not share in any sense in its corporate rights. They formed a floating element in the population, wandering hither and thither as prosperity waxed or waned. Strangers passing through the country were astonished to find in most of the towns wealthy merchants living side by side with a poor and discontented populace.

The discontent was unavailing and fruitless. An unorganized proletariate was incapable of drilling its forces to take common action. It had not sufficient consciousness of its common interests to form a distinct class. It was as completely outside the social life of the town as it was outside the protection of its law. It had absolutely no share in its municipal activity. As conservative politically as they were economically, the towns carefully excluded this class

from any share in the municipal franchise. The qualifications of burgesses remained in the 16th century exactly what they had been in the 14th. The "members" of the municipal corporation had not undergone the least alteration, though all had changed around them. At Ghent, for instance, in spite of the decay of the cloth trade, the weavers' guild preserved its ancient preponderating authority in the general meetings of the commune. The place given to the different crafts in the administration of the town was measured by their past, not by their present, importance. Whether a branch of industry languished or prospered, the corporations representing it continued permanently to enjoy the rights which had been won by them, and which were sanctioned by their privileges. Thus the representation of interests, which the democratic government had been at such pains to establish in the towns, became now nothing but a caricature. It was too stereotyped to answer any longer to the needs of the age. Established institutions remained unchanged; no one troubled to find out whether they still corresponded with the facts of the case and had their appropriate share of rights and duties. In fact the municipal organization, by simply remaining what the "commons" had made it in the 14th century, had become by force of circumstances purely aristocratic. The course of economic and social evolution had resulted in the control of the town being left entirely in the hands of a small number of privileged groups. Burgher rights, which formerly had been extended to the whole population of the towns, were now confined to a small section of it. This limited body constituted a caste, almost closed to the large working class which

had been called into existence by the new capitalism. Already the logic of facts was defining the meaning of the word *bourgeois* in the narrow and exclusive sense in which it is still used by the modern socialist.

Thus the industrial proletariate was carefully excluded from all legal right to take part in the public affairs of the town. The men composing it, moreover, lived under such different conditions, and were for the most part so wretched that they never so much as thought of claiming political rights for themselves. Yet it is none the less true that the lower classes more than once rose in serious revolts, and caused the authorities lively disquiet. But these disturbances were always due to sheer misery. The considerable increase of prices, which occurred all over Europe during the 16th century, and made itself felt in the Low Countries from about 1550, aggravated the wretchedness of the condition of the people, because the slight rise in wages only partly compensated for the fall in the value of money. We are, therefore, not astonished to observe from that time onwards numerous risings, brought about perhaps by the imposition of a new tax, or more often by the rise in the price of corn or beer. These riots, however, though sometimes violent, were always of very short duration, and only resulted in the pillage of granaries or the looting of the houses of some of the merchants. Unlike the men of the mediæval communes, the famished crowd of men, women and children who were driven into insurrection, were without arms, and the municipal militia easily got the better of them. A few executions for the sake of example served to put a stop to the trouble. The magistrates reduced the

price of bread for a short time, and order was restored until a new crisis in their misery provoked a new outburst of impotent fury.

III.

The Rising at Ghent against Charles V.

At last it happened that the crafts, discontented with the central power, appealed to the very proletariate which they had so habitually and carefully disregarded. Such was the case, for example, in 1539, after the conflict between the governor, Mary of Hungary, and the people of Ghent, when the town refused the aid required to withstand an invasion of the Low Countries by Francis I. The "members" of the artisan guilds profited by the opportunity to re-establish the municipal government abolished by the peace of Gavere,[1] that is to say, to return to the direct government of the commune by its three "members" and to all the particularism of the Middle Ages. It is impossible to doubt the spirit that animated them, when we find them, in their hatred of capitalism and economic liberty, demanding the revival of the privilege which forbade the exercise of any manufacture within a radius of three leagues round the town. But almost at once they found themselves swamped by the unprivileged masses. The authority of the deans of the guilds was openly set at nought. Bands of vagabonds poured into the town from the country, filled it with their loud

1. See p. 192.

demands, spread terror by their violence and prepared to sack the monasteries and the houses of the rich. Soon, at Oudenarde, Courtrai, Ypres, Lille, Grammont, Armentières, "the poor folk and others of mean estate" adopted a menacing attitude. But the danger was more apparent than real. The people, left to themselves, fell into anarchy. The turbulence of the crowd was equalled by its military weakness and its political blindness. To resist the forces of the emperor, the rebels dragged to their dilapidated walls the antiquated bombards of the Middle Ages. They also begged for the support of Francis I. But the French king, then at peace with Charles V, hastened to inform the emperor of their strange overtures.

Exasperated by the presumption of the insurgents Charles resolved to inflict exemplary punishment upon Ghent. He came to the place with an imposing military force on February 14th, 1540; he instructed the public prosecutor of the High Court at Mechlin to draw up an indictment against the town. To bring into relief his sovereign power, he took care not to treat Ghent as a belligerent: he professed to see in it merely a rebel. Sentence was pronounced on April 29th. The people of Ghent were proclaimed guilty of sedition and treason. They were in consequence deprived of all their privileges, and were compelled to surrender to their prince the charters guaranteeing them their franchises. All the property belonging to the commune and the crafts, all the arms and the artillery belonging to the town were confiscated. It was decided that "Roland," the big bell of the belfry, should be taken down. The *échevins*, thirty burghers, the dean of the weavers, ten men of each craft, fifty

of the weavers' "member" and fifty *creesers*,[1] barefooted, bare-headed and in their shirts, were to sue for the forgiveness of the emperor. The moat round the town walls was to be filled up from the Antwerp Gate to the Scheldt. Moreover the town was to pay its share of the aid that had been refused, and in addition a fine of 150,000 gold "Charles." Finally, it was to repay all those who had been compelled to make it advances during the disturbances.

The next day, April 30th, the proclamation was made of the "Caroline Concession," which abolished for ever the ancient constitution of Ghent and was destined to remain in force until the fall of the *ancien régime*. Not only did it make the *échevins* of Ghent the nominees of the prince, but it suppressed the three "members" of the corporation and willed that the whole population should thenceforth form only "one body and community." The *collace*, that is to say the great council of the commune, was abolished: it was replaced by the meeting of certain deputies from the parishes, chosen by the prince's steward and the *échevins*. In this assembly resolutions were decided by a bare majority of votes. The crafts were reduced to the position of simple industrial societies, strictly controlled by the police and the magistrates. The deans of the guilds were replaced by the *oversten*, appointed by the steward and the *échevins*; their classification was completely remodelled and brought into harmony with the transformed economic situation; a number of guilds, no longer answering to any need, were abolished; their number fell from fifty-three to twenty one. Outside its immediate vicinity, the town

1. "Brawlers"; the name given to those who had administered the town during the troubles.

lost the remnants of the power it had exercised over the castelry and also the right of creating foreign burghers. Finally, to secure its obedience for the future, a strong fortress was built on the site of the old monastery of St. Bavon, at the junction of the Scheldt and the Lys. The new citadel was begun while the population was still kept in terror by daily executions, and the halls and plate of the crafts were being sold by auction.

The severity with which Charles V. treated the town of Ghent, in which he had been born and towards which he had till then shown particular goodwill, is not entirely explained by his firm determination to demonstrate to the burghers of the Low Countries the reality of his sovereign power. The Caroline Concession is not merely an act of vengeance from an angry potentate; it is rather the programme of a new method of government. It must be regarded as a long-considered measure, expressing the modern attitude of the state in dealing with the great communes. It had a twofold aim. The more important was to subordinate the exclusiveness of the towns and the protectionist policy of the craft guilds to economic liberty and capitalist commerce. A contemporary remarks that "the merchants, who always want freedom for their trade, were unwilling to visit, frequent or dwell in Ghent," because of the excessive franchises of its burghers. Henceforth they came to settle there in great numbers and founded powerful houses. Industry, freed from the tutelage of the privileged corporations, grew rapidly. The town became the great market for Flemish linen, and when the canal to Terneuzen, begun in 1547, had given an

opening to the sea, Ghent experienced a new era of prosperity which went on increasing till the troubled reign of Philip II, and finally even caused serious anxiety in Antwerp. In 1565 Guicciardini compared her to Milan, the richest Italian city of his time. She had ceased to be a mediæval commune and had become a modern town.

But if the "Caroline Concession" is the outcome of a stage in economic development, the motives which inspired its author were purely political. Charles V. only reduced the town to such strict subjection in order to make it incapable of resisting his future projects. In spite of the modifications made by the Burgundian government, the constitution of Ghent still preserved numerous traces of its former democratic character. The *échevins* could not by themselves bind the town. All important questions, and particularly all financial questions, had to be submitted to the "three members" of the community. Without their consent no new tax could be raised, and this consent was often very difficult to secure, each "member" maintaining that decisions were only valid when they were unanimous. It was therefore possible for a single "member" to prevent the imposition of a tax approved by the rest of the population. Now since the beginning of the 16th. century, the growing expenses of the prince and especially his continual wars compelled him to have continual recourse to subsidies from the States General. We can, therefore, understand the impatience with which he bore the pretention of a few craft guilds to upset his plans by refusing the supplies which he judged indispensable to carry out his policy. In reality the complicated

machinery of the States General did not allow them to vote at all. The representatives of the different provinces who had seats, "were only charged to listen," and were obliged to consult their constituencies before they were authorised to make any answer. Almost always the resistance of a single town encouraged the others to follow its example. It thus happened that the obstinacy of a single "member," that is to say of a weak minority of the smaller burghers, compromised altogether the grant of a new tax.

To get out of the difficulty thus occasioned, both the governors and the emperor himself had tried to substitute a majority vote for the unanimous vote in the town council. The right of a single voice to veto any proposition was utterly incompatible with the normal working of any kind of government by discussion. Yet the crafts had always insisted upon its being upheld as one of their most precious privileges. Under the circumstances then, we are not surprised to find Charles V. profiting by the revolt of Ghent to suppress a state of things so unfavourable to his interests and to the financial administration of the state. The suppression of the "members" of Ghent gave him a radical solution of his troubles. Henceforth the *échevins* and the notables were only summoned to give their consent to taxation, and that consent was assured beforehand, because the *échevins* were nominated by the agents of the sovereign and the notables always belonged to ancient burgher families which were devoted to his service.

Thus this judgment of 1540 secured the incorporation of the town in the state and showed clearly the

tendency of the monarch's policy. Unable to deprive his dominions in the Low Countries of their right to vote taxes without exciting a general revolt, the emperor turned the position which he could not take by assault. By the new constitution thus bestowed upon Ghent, he sapped the strength of the first town of Flanders, and Ghent usually gave the lead to the other towns of the whole county. It is evident that the "Caroline Concession" laid down the form of government that he would have been glad to establish everywhere. But it is also characteristic that he made no effort to enforce its provisions in the other towns of Flanders. In spite of the inconveniences to the central power resulting from their franchises, the towns against which no grievance could be alleged preserved their old institutions. The "nations" of the communes of Brabant in particular, still caused the governors much anxiety. The government attained its end by "Acts of Comprehension."[1] The remembrance of the punishment which Ghent had suffered made the towns accept them lest worse should befall. The autocratic tendency was not strong enough to gain a complete ascendancy. It only destroyed privileges when it was in a position to invoke in its favour the terrible law of treason. But no one had any doubt about the aim of the administration. The franchises that it suffered to continue so as not to violate tradition, were no longer a serious obstacle to progress, for everyone knew that any attempt to make them effective would be the signal for their abolition.

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CHAPTER X.

THE TOWNS DURING THE PERIOD OF THE REFORMATION.

I. Social and Political Movements resulting from the Reformation.—II. The Towns under Calvinist Government.

I.

Social and Political Movements resulting from the Reformation.

The municipal and economic system of the Middle Ages was already disappearing under the influence of the Renaissance when the Reformation provoked fresh disturbances in the remodelled towns of the Netherlands.

From 1518 the first signs of Lutheranism can be discerned among the cosmopolitan population of Antwerp, and after that time heresy quickly spread from place to place in spite of the formidable edicts published by Charles V. However, the Lutheran propaganda, though a menace to the established church, had no quarrel with either the state or society. The first protestants were in no wise revolutionaries, and remained absolutely loyal to the emperor who sent them to the stake. But through the breach which they had made in traditional beliefs, anabaptism almost immediately flowed into the Low Countries.

Brought to Emden in 1529 by Melchior Hoffman, it spread at once through the northern provinces and speedily reached Brabant, Flanders and Limburg. The simplicity of anabaptist theology and its apocalyptic mysticism exercised an irresistible attraction on the minds of the common people. The new doctrine condemned the organization of society as the work of the evil one and aspired to destroy it. It claimed to found on the ruins of the existing social system the Heavenly City, where there was no room for inequality and injustice, and where love and charity would break down all social distinctions. How could such promises fail to gain the enthusiastic adhesion of the swarms of poor labourers whose numbers, both in the towns and the country districts, were ever increasing owing to the new economic conditions? Its influence was similar to that of the lollards upon the weavers in the Middle Ages.

The illimitable hopes which anabaptism planted in the hearts of the people, the dazzling contrast which it drew, between the misery of their present condition and the blissful future in a world freed from the double oppression of church and state, put the patience and the resignation of the toiling masses to an excessively severe test. Hoffman certainly did not preach violence; but it was inevitable that his converts should have recourse to it sooner or later. In 1533 a prophet arose among the people in John Matthijs, a baker of Haarlem. He came to announce to the "just" and the "pure" the hour of vengeance, It was no longer enough to await patiently the Kingdom of God; it must be established by the sword. The wicked must be rooted out and the walls of the New Jerusalem

must be cemented with their blood. Away with priests! But also, away with property, the army, law courts, and masters! From this time the religious question became also a social one. All the supporters of the established order, regardless of religious differences, banded themselves together against the anarchic mysticism of the anabaptists. The protestants hated them as much as the catholics. They were hunted down with the pitiless ferocity of blind fear. During the siege of Münster, where the chiefs of the movement had assembled to found the New Jerusalem, the soldiers of Mary of Hungary cut to pieces the bands who were marching to join their brethren. In the month of June 1535, a proclamation condemned all the anabaptists to death, even those who should abjure their errors.

The fall of Münster (June 25th, 1535) put an end to the revolutionary attempts of the anabaptists. The crisis had been too violent to recur again. Although the sect did not disappear, its tendencies were modified. It ceased to draw recruits from the lower orders. It gave birth to gentle and inoffensive communities of faithful souls who aimed at restoring primitive christianity on the basis of brotherly love and individual liberty without clergy or sacraments. Nevertheless it long continued under the ban of the state. No church has supplied so many victims to the heresy-hunters, and when the first Calvinists appeared in the Low Countries, they were at first confounded with the anabaptists, though they hated the anabaptists as fiercely as they hated the catholics.

Calvinism was no less revolutionary than anabaptism, but in a different way. Instead of attacking

society, its aim was to destroy the church. Moreover the destruction of the church was sought only in order to set up a new church in its place. And this church, the instrument of God's law, conceived that part of its mission was to reconstruct the state in accordance with its own spirit, that is to say, it was to be submitted to the rule of the Calvinist church. Its ideal consisted in the subjection of the lay power to the authority of the church. The end to be attained was the theocratic state, such as the master, Calvin, had founded at Geneva. The gospel was to triumph despite even the prince, who was considered as nothing but a tyrant so long as he opposed the word of God. Thus the revolution let loose by the anabaptists against society was transferred by the Calvinists to the political arena. It appealed at once to all classes of the people. Its propaganda, bold, active and militant, soon won it adherents in the most diverse social spheres, from among the nobility, from among the capitalists from the lower middle class, and from the wage-earners.

It was, however, among the working class that Calvin's teaching spread most rapidly. The chief centres of its growth were to be found just where the great industries were supreme. It made the most rapid progress at Tournai, Valenciennes, Lille, Hondschoote and Armentières, around Oudenarde, in the ports of Holland and Zealand, and finally at Antwerp, the very centre of the economic life of the Low Countries. Above all, it triumphed where the worker was reduced to a precarious existence, and where his sufferings drove him to catch at every novelty. Discontent, the spirit of revolt, and the hope of bettering his lot, worked without exception in favour of Calvinism and

was aroused by taxes of the tenth and the twentieth penny, imitated from the Castilian *alcalabas*, which Alva claimed to impose on the provinces that they might henceforth pay for the maintenance of the troops who kept them in subjection. In the presence of their Spanish garrisons, the towns perceived that taking up arms would only end in useless massacres. They had recourse to a general strike. The artisans shut up their workshops; the salesmen deserted the market-place; all business was suspended and the terrible duke in the face of the dumb protest of a whole nation gave way to bursts of impotent fury.

II.

The Towns under Calvinist Government.

Such was the situation when on April 1st, 1572, a bold stroke threw the little town of Brielle into the power of the "beggars," as the rebels were called. Immediately, in all the neighbouring towns where the garrisons were away, the people rose, opened the gates to the liberators and turned out the magistrates. The calvinists took the lead in the movement. Relying on the lower classes, the fishermen and the throng of poor men, whom the new taxes had reduced to despair, they turned the political situation to their advantage. In a few weeks all the exiles who had been driven out of the provinces by the tyranny of Alva, all the protestants who had preferred banishment to renunciation of their faith, poured into Zealand. French Huguenots hastened to swell their ranks. Religious conviction, hatred of the papacy, hatred of Spain and finally, the reckless courage of men who had nothing

to lose but life, made of the heterogeneous and cosmopolitan mob a redoubtable army if only a leader could be found for it. Such a leader was found in William of Nassau. He put himself at the head of the rebels. Like his following, he risked everything in the hope of gaining everything. With him in command chaos gave way to order. The mob lording it over the disorderly towns was reduced to discipline. Everything was subordinated to the necessities of defence. All men yielded to the clear-headed unswerving genius of William the Silent.

Despite this the southern provinces fell back under the power of Spain. During the heroic resistance which Holland and Zealand offered, first to Alva (1572—1573), and then to Requesens (1573—1576), the south made no effort to shake off the alien yoke. In proportion as the rebellion took on a character more and more calvinistic, the sympathy which it had at first elicited in Belgium, where the catholic element was much the stronger, gave place little by little to distrust. When, in 1576, after the unexpected death of the governor Requesens, the Council of State and the States General were charged with the provisional administration of the country, we find these bodies asserting their loyalty to king Philip and their determination not to tolerate any religion but catholicism, and displaying, still more clearly, their growing antipathy to the prince of Orange. The great nobles tried to exploit the situation so as to recover the ascendancy they had enjoyed under Margaret of Parma. Their policy was to restore to the country its old traditional constitution as it existed in the time of the dukes of Burgundy and Charles V.

It was then that the towns took the lead. An opposition, like that of the nobility, who continued to protest their loyalty to their lawful prince, no longer satisfied them. They demanded radical measures. The hatred roused by the Spanish government urged them to an open rupture with Philip II. The success of the resistance in Holland and Zealand excited their hopes of winning absolute freedom. Among the educated middle class, the political pamphlets, issued on the morrow of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, which definitely upheld the right of the people to depose a tyrant, were greedily devoured and applied against Philip. Then came, in 1576, the Pacification of Ghent, which established between the rebellious and the obedient provinces a defensive alliance, based upon respect for individual liberty of conscience. After this the calvinist propaganda grew more active than ever and, as before, attracted to it the masses which had been already stirred by it some years previously.

Soon religion and politics were inextricably mingled in Belgium as in Holland. Opposition to Spain involved at the same time adherence to the reformers, who profited by all the animosities that Philip had drawn upon himself. It was to no purpose that municipal magistrates, the members of the Council of State, the deputies of the States General, in short all the constituted authorities, remained catholic. Power had clearly slipped from their hands into those of the mob, which was subject both to the influence of the calvinistic ministers, and to that of the emissaries of the prince of Orange. The burghers of Brussels terrorized the States General which sat in their midst. All at once Ghent, excited by the example of the

capital, pushed matters to an extremity. Two demagogues, relying on the calvinist party, seized the government of the town. Thanks to the troops sent by Orange to attack the citadel, to which the Spanish garrison had fled for refuge, they established a purely protestant government, persecuted the catholics and opened conventicles, in which fanatical preachers incited the people to overthrow idols and expel the clergy. But to give this religious revolution some appearance of legality, and at the same time to emphasize its opposition to the monarchy, the constitution abolished by Charles V in 1540, was restored. All the ancient privileges of the municipality were again established. As in the Middle Ages, the commune was divided into three " members " ; the *collace* was called together; the crafts again entered into their political rights, while the small towns and villages of the castelry again fell under the power of Ghent.

This restoration of the mediæval system was mere antiquarianism. The old institutions were no longer workable because they no longer corresponded to the actual condition of the population. Owing to the utter ruin of the cloth trade, the "member" of the weavers existed only in name, while the introduction of new industries and the decline of the old ones, made the revival of the fifty-two traditional crafts an anachronism. That, however, was of little importance. Actually no one thought of reviving the old municipal organization; its restoration was only a formality; the underlying reality had nothing in common with it. In fact, the government was carried on neither by the crafts nor by the *collace*, but by the council of war, a sort of committee of public safety in which sat the

calvinist leaders and the chief officers of the troops. The government of the town was entirely military. The spirit animating this government had nothing in common with the old municipal spirit. Its aim was the absolute triumph of calvinism, and it drew its inspiration from the pastors, who ceaselessly fanned its fanaticism against the catholic majority. Protestantism became the persecuting instead of a persecuted body. Thanks to some regiments of soldiers and to the support of the masses, calvinism got power into its hands and abused it. At Brussels and at Antwerp similar conditions produced like results. There too "committees of the eighteen" had regular troops at their disposal, and, under cover of the old institutions, in reality exercised a dictatorship which was half theocratic and half demagogic. In vain the prince of Orange strove to recall the insane zealots to reason; in vain he urged upon them the need of moderation, of the maintenance of liberty of conscience and the supreme duty of uniting all their forces against the common foe. Their ungoverned religious passion now turned upon him. Ministers denounced him from the pulpit as a papist. The prudence and the caution, which his political genius imposed upon them, were branded as treason and an outrage to the divine majesty. In the eyes of the fanatical calvinists who lorded it over the great towns, the national union of the Netherlands no longer mattered. What they wanted was a federal system of cantons as in Switzerland; liberty for each great town to organize within its walls the strict and exclusive observance of the "true religion" and to impose it on to the neighbouring countryside. It was of small account that the nobility,

exasperated by their fanaticism, returned to the king; and that the Walloon provinces, where the protestant host had not penetrated and where the calvinist minority was powerless, concluded peace with Farnese; nothing was done to remedy the situation. The towns remained irreconcilable until the day when, one after another, they were blockaded by the Spanish troops, and, finally opening their gates to the conquerors, suffered the fate that William of Orange had predicted.