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THESES

THE DUTCH
BEGGARS

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The series of quite unparalleled oppressions to which the Netherlands were subjected during the reign of Philip II of Spain are well known to all who are, in the least, acquainted with the history of those ocean-choked lands.

The people were slow, stubborn Dutchmen of the same Anglo-Saxon stock which forms the basis of our race. They have been, always, noted for their industry, perseverance and love of liberty. There was no people more wealthy or law-abiding till Philip began his persecutions of heretics among them. They became then, a country divided against itself. The Catholics were, for the most part, in sympathy with the efforts of the monarch to put down the new religion. Those who were believers in the new religion were no less bitter against the Catholics. The stronger party continually tormented and reviled the weaker. They, both, hated the foreign soldiers but their hatred for each other was too great to admit of any united resistance.

At length, the people began to see the misery which the Spanish inquisition was bringing to their land, and to realize that freedom of religious belief ought to be granted them; but they were too good natured and peaceable to rebel against the rule of their sovereign, suddenly. They could not look through the long vista of future events ^{and} understand that nothing less than rebellion to the king and the establishment of a new and independent nation could ever release them from their troubles. They could not know, as we do, that the monarch to whom they were so faithful would deceive, flatter, and torture them for years until when they should be compelled to use the most extreme measures, they would be in so weak a condition as not to be even a suitable shadow of the once prosperous, wealthy country.

There was, however, from the first, a few of the wiser men, who, though not at all disloyal to the king, believed in more liberality and freedom and placed themselves in opposition

to the inquisition, Spanish officers and soldiery seeing the real merit of some of the heretic martyrs or realizing how completely the Spanish priests were steeped in sin, they objected to the religious persecution which had taken place since the accession of Philip. A band of these nobles, the most powerful in the land formed a league to oppose the inquisition. They drew up a petition or request which was handed to Margaret of Parma, the Duchess Regent. This was presented with much ceremony and the regent, knowing the dissatisfied condition of the whole land was sorely agitated as to how she should reply to it. One of her confidants is reported to have said: "What Madam, is it possible that your Highness can entertain fears of these beggars?" The words were destined to become immortal and to give a popular name to the confederacy. The petition, however, accomplished no more than the dozens of similar ones. The answer was indirect and unsatisfactory though containing numerous promises, not to be fulfilled.

At a banquet, given by one of these nobles, a short time afterwards the disparaging remark was repeated with the words: "They call us

beggars. Let us accept the name. We will contend with the inquisition but remain loyal to the king even till compelled to wear the beggars sack. The company were delighted and hailed the cry "long live the beggars" with shouts of applause. Thus first was heard the cry which was destined so often to sound over that land of blood stained battle fields, burning cities and desolate plains and which yet would bid defiance to proud Philip.

These reckless nobles decided on a costume and soon appeared in a peculiar gray habit with a beggars bowl attached to the side. They had medals struck bearing their motto "Faithful to the king even to beggary" and trimmed their beards the better to resemble real mendicants. Their rejoicings and merry makings were frequent and their intemperance and extravagance, shameful. Their movements were looked upon with great disfavor by the more prudent of the nobles.

This reform like most others was disgraced, thus, in its early days, by the unreasonable recklessness of those who had enrolled

themselves in the good cause. For years, therefore, the most important leaders on the side of liberty were to struggle against the oppressions of the enemy and the rash measures of their unwise confederates.

It was long after the adoption of the name beggars, as signifying a party opposed to the then present administration, characterized by persecutions, bribery and corruption in law and the church that the beggars became warriors, fighting against the soldiers of the king. Even then it was only after years of warfare that they renounced the king entirely. Nearly every one of the rollicking nobles composing the noisy party who first took unto themselves the name "beggars" was there slain or dead. They had deeply disgraced the name by their excesses and orgies. The few who lived, sobered by dangers and miseries about them, became quite different in character but the name still clung to them and to their patriotic companions. Thus the party which was strong enough to wage war with a kingdom for nearly half a century and finally gain its independence was known as "beggars."

The beggars came to be no insignificant handful of insurrectionists without a definite idea of what displeased them or what would give them satisfaction. They were a nation overrun by foreigners, ground down with taxation, mutilated and destroyed by the inquisition and deprived of all rights and privileges. They were forced to desperation and the deeds of the wild beggars, the wood beggars and the beggars of the sea became powerful enough at last to rouse a terror in palace or hovel, by forest or lake, and to teach their enemies to know the result of driving a people to madness.

The well known nursery rhyme,

Hark, hark the little dogs bark
The beggars are coming to town
Some in rags and some in tags
And some in velvet gowns,

serves as a very simple but strong illustration of the manner in which they were regarded. It shows that the terror which the name beggar would call forth was sufficient to make this simple verse expressive for centuries. This fear was mainly caused by the marauders and highway robbers who

committed great excesses in many parts of the country robbing
plundering and murdering. Their principal wrath was against
religious houses and persons. These bands, unfortunately were
only ruffian gangs whose very existence was engendered out
of the social and moral putrescence to which the country was
reduced. The beggars of the sea were almost as terrible as the
wild or forest beggars but soon the commanders of ships were
placed under strict orders, compelled to render account of
their proceedings and so this party afterward developed into the
navy which in the course of the following centuries was to make
itself famous by its victories. These beggars of the sea were mainly
Hollanders who being driven from their homes by try army took to
the ocean. Of their their ships they made houses and schools.
Here they were born, educated and were taught their professions
and consequently here they were so skilful as to surpass any
other people. So, it is the more to be regretted that while they had
the ostensible motive of making war against the Spanish regents
they should have indulged in outlawry and crime.

The first military of this conflict was the siege of Valenciennes. This was an entire success to the royalists yet they stipulated that the city should not be sacked or the lives of the inhabitants endangered. They however confiscated the property and burned, beheaded, strangled or hung most of the people. This is only one, and a very mild example of the many similar occurrences which happened during this long, bloody revolution. The troops of the beggars were for the most part either reckless religious fanatics, entirely ignorant of warfare, or hired mercenaries, indifferent to the cause, mutinous from ill pay and no match whatever for the regular Spanish troops, led by the best generals of the day. The history of this warfare seems discouraging enough viewed on the side of liberty but on the sea the rebels were more successful. At their head was a statesman who could outwit any monarch of his time. In all the history of the war there is not shown so much persistence, fortitude and masterly skill in managing as in the siege of Leyden. In this siege too it truly seems we can see a divine mediation. When it was clearly seen that the starving city fifteen miles inland must be placed on the sea, a storm sent the

floods of water through the broken dykes sufficient for the passage of ships to the city. Then, there were forts which might either indefinitely delay the ships or quite destroy the expedition; but a miraculous cowardice filled the hearts of the garrisons and they fled, leaving the way clear to the rescuers. Moreover during the siege when his skilled and prudent mind was almost indispensable to the existence of the city, William, Prince of Orange, was prostrated with fever. His recovery seemed to be just in time to save the perishing people. Although so amply successful in this undertaking, they met with many discouragements. But men fighting for liberty and religion do not despond easily. At certain times when prospects seemed especially hopeless, the poor people nearly beggars indeed, would desire peace at almost any price but never at the unconditional terms which the Spanish exacted. Their chief, the undaunted William though bereft of property, brothers and son by these unfortunate events, never despairing encouraged his war weary companions to perseverance. Much sorrow was caused to the party by the treachery of their leaders for not abundant were the officers who, with ruin and want constantly

staring them in the face could resist the tempting rewards offered by Philip and his agents for the relinquishment of a desperate cause. Through decades of discouragements and disquiet the provinces held out till the resources of the country were well nigh exhausted by the armies of foes and defenders. They were virtually independent from the time of the declaration of independence in 1808 though a wearisome warfare continued to sap the energies of the country for many years. Before this declaration the warfare was carried on by the beggars against the king's armies on the principle that they were not fighting the king who really had only the good interests of their country at heart but they opposed the Spanish officers who were destroying them with taxations and persecutions. In consequence of this, the people defended their country for the king and in his name. This continued till they were compelled to see that the persecutions would last as long as Philip ruled.

At the time of this declaration the provinces earnestly desired the man whose genius had so materially aided them through out their troubles, to become their chief and it would have been better so.

William, the Silent, was too unselfish and unambitious, this time for his country's good. He recommended that they take the Duke of Anjou for their sovereign count. He believed that by this means the alliance of both France and England could be gained and he feared that without help the Netherlands could not succeed. The most zealous of the patriots refused to accept the Duke but some of the provinces, unfortunately, yielded. He was the most treacherous and despicable of their sworn protectors, and though unsuccessful in his schemes he threw a confusion over the country, very advantageous to the Spanish.

It seems truly wonderful that so small and so greatly divided a people could endure the great destruction both of life and property which they suffered at the hands of their oppressors, and still be able to resist them. This insignificant people wearied with war the king of Spain and his thousands of soldiers and could still continue war after the revenues of the man who owned all America and half Europe, were exhausted. Yet this was the same race that formerly caused the powerful Caesar so much trouble

It was destined that this little nation should be the first among all those peoples, who in order to serve their own ways, risking their all and braving all dangers were to be placed in positions of security and independence, at last. The beggars were to become the father of the first republic of modern times and their example was to shine as a beacon of encouragement to their kindred of England and America who were to take up the battle for freedom in the succeeding centuries.