

THE PROBLEMS OF THE PERIOD

sanguinary fanatics who for three dozen years had wasted it in their frantic and interminable conflicts. It established in France for eighty-seven years not toleration, but a separation of the spheres of the rival intolerances; not freedom of worship, but a specification of the localities in which each of the two tyrannies should be enforced. It was an improvement on the ubiquitous and indiscriminate battle, murder, and sudden death which had prevailed in France for more than a generation. It gave the nation tranquillity at the cost of dividing it into two antagonistic and segregated sections. It meant that if a citizen changed his religion he had no longer to send for the undertaker, but merely for the furniture-remover; he had to prepare not for a precipitate journey from this world to the next, but only for a comparatively easy transit from Paris to La Rochelle, or *vice versa*.

The statesmen whose compromising expedients it embodies were the so-called *Politiques*. Inaugurated about 1561 by the noble and large-minded Chancellor L'Hôpital, they had gradually gained in number and in influence as the civil war had run its disastrous course, until finally under Henry IV they had obtained sufficient power to impose peace upon the combatants and issue the famous edict of compromise. But it was clear that, although it gave tranquillity and effected a truce, it settled no question of principle, and left the vital problem of the limits of religious liberty to be dealt with from the very rudiments. It merely indicated one method by means of which it could be temporarily shelved—a method practicable only when politicians were indifferent to orthodoxy, and the orthodox were too much exhausted to continue to fight.

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While the French were embroiled in their suicidal Wars of Religion, their neighbours, the men of the Netherlands, were engaged in a life-or-death struggle for emancipation from the horrors of the Inquisition and from the tyranny of Spain. The very year which saw in France the Massacre of Vassy (1562) witnessed also the dispatch from the Low Countries of a petition to Madrid, begging Philip II to put a stop to religious persecution, to withdraw Spanish troops, to recall