

him with the opposite opinions of his councillors, enabled him the more accurately to form his own. In the mean time, the value which he set on both the great chiefs made him careful not to disgust either by any show of preference for his rival. He held the balance adroitly between them; and if on any occasion he bestowed a mark of his favor on the one, it was usually followed by some equivalent to the other.¹⁶ Thus, for the first twelve years of his reign their influence may be said to have been pretty equally exerted. Then came the memorable discussion respecting the royal visit to the Netherlands. Alva, as the reader may remember, was of the opinion that Philip should send an army to punish the refractory and bring the country to obedience, when the king might visit it with safety to his own person. Ruy Gomez, on the other hand, recommended that Philip should go at once, without an army, and by mild and conciliatory measures win the malecontents back to their allegiance. Each advised the course most congenial to his own temper, and the one, moreover, which would have required the aid of his own services to carry it into execution. Unfortunately, the violent measures of Alva were more congenial to the stern temper of the king, and the duke was sent at the head of his battalions.

But if Alva thus gained the victory, it was Ruy Gomez who reaped the fruits of it. Left without a rival in the council, his influence became predominant over every

¹⁶ Ranke has given some pertinent examples of this in an interesting sketch which he has presented of the relative positions of these two statesmen in the cabinet of Philip. Ottoman and Spanish Empires (Eng. trans.), p. 38.