

maintain itself in the same extent under the successors of that prince. In the Low Countries, which composed a part of that empire, Charlemagne had established Governors, who, with the title of Duke, Marquis, or Count, ruled under him in the different provinces.

During the reign of Charlemagne, and for some time after his death, while the reverence of his name lasted, those Governors kept themselves within the bounds of duty, but in succeeding times, when the reins of empire were slackened in the hands of his feeble descendants, and when the empire that he had formed was weakened, by its divisions, into distinct monarchies, the Governors in the Netherlands, by degrees, withdrew themselves from obedience, and, paying only vain marks of homage to the Kings of France and Germany, assumed to themselves, and transmitted to their descendants, the sovereignty of those provinces which they had before governed only with a delegated sway. Thus arose the Dukes of Brabant, the Counts of Flanders and Hainault, and the other Princes of the Low Countries, already, in the eleventh century, possessed of independent power.

The provinces of the Netherlands, which were thus formed into small and distinct principalities, governed by their respective sovereigns, preserved that form for some ages; and during that period were acquired those important privileges which have since remained to the Austrian Netherlands. The Princes of these countries, that they might better maintain their new acquired authority, admitted to a share of their power the nobles, and the prelates, or abbots, who possessed the largest part of the lands. The people, depressed at first in the Netherlands, as in other countries of Europe in that age, yet soon rose here into consideration. Collected in cities, they betook themselves to commerce, for which their situation was favourable, and to arts, to which their genius was well adapted. The Princes became sensible of the advantages that they might derive from the commercial spirit of their subjects, and encouraged their industry by numerous privileges. The people readily admitted the Princes to a share of their wealth; but whilst they bestowed their riches, secured to themselves, in return, new franchises and immunities: thus, by degrees, a free constitution was formed. The cities, increasing in inhabitants, and not easily controlled by Princes whose dominions were of small extent, became, as it were, small republics, that were governed by their own magistrates, and whose voice had a mighty influence in the state. Li-

berly spread itself from the cities into the country. The pride of the nobles was restrained, the power of the Princes was circumscribed, and the tyranny of the feudal system disappeared sooner in these countries than in the most parts of Europe.

The wealth and greatness of the provinces kept pace with the privileges acquired by the people so early as in the thirteenth and fourteenth century. When most nations in Europe, and England in particular, were destitute of trade or industry, commerce and manufactures flourished in the Netherlands, and proved to that country a plentiful source of riches. Above all, these provinces, now known by the name of the Austrian Netherlands, were distinguished by their industry and opulence. Flanders and Brabant were filled with large and crowded cities, the abodes of wealthy merchants and busy artisans. The woven fabrics of Louvain, of Ypres, and other cities, employed the labour of multitudes, and drew into this country the gold of distant nations. Bruges was noted for its commerce, and the principal traffic of Europe was carried on at its port. Ghent surpassed all the cities of the Low Countries in extent and populousness. The riches that flowed into this region, from the traffic and ingenuity of the people, were far greater than might be conceived from the rude state of Europe in those ages. The gold acquired by merchandize was employed in the improvement of the lands, and agriculture made here its earliest and most vigorous advances. The Princes of the Netherlands, while their power was limited by the privileges which they had bestowed, found their importance increase by the splendor of their cities and the wealth of their subjects.

In the beginning of the fifteenth century, a remarkable era in the history of the Netherlands, all the provinces of the Low Countries, with a small exception, were, from various causes, and by various means, united under the dominion of the Dukes of Burgundy, a younger branch of the royal family of France. These opulent and flourishing provinces, which seemed to have been destined, by their situation, to form one monarchy, now united under the same government, formed to the Dukes of Burgundy the richest domain in Europe. The court of these Princes displayed a magnificence that was not equalled in the courts of Kings: their alliance was sought by the greatest monarchs, and they were often able to control the power of the elder branch of their family, the Kings of France. Under the Princes of this house, the provinces of the Netherlands, knit together