

them to this abject condition. But he was as careful as his father could have been that they should not rise from it. The legislative power of the commons, that most important of all their privileges, was nearly annihilated. The Castilian cortes were, it is true, frequently convoked under Philip,—more frequently, on the whole, than in any preceding reign. For in them still resided the power of voting supplies for the crown. To have summoned them so often, therefore, was rather a proof of the necessities of the government than of respect for the rights of the commons.

The cortes, it is true, still enjoyed the privilege of laying their grievances before the king; but, as they were compelled to vote the supplies before they presented their grievances, they had lost the only lever by which they could effectually operate on the royal will. Yet when we review their petitions, and see the care with which they watched over the interests of the nation and the courage with which they maintained them, we cannot refuse our admiration. We must acknowledge that under every circumstance of discouragement and oppression the old Castilian spirit still lingered in the hearts of the people. In proof of this, it will not be amiss to cite a few of these petitions, which, whether successful or not, may serve at least to show the state of public opinion on the topics to which they relate.

One, of repeated recurrence, is a remonstrance to the king on the enormous expense of his household,—“as great,” say the cortes, “as would be required for the conquest of a kingdom.”⁵¹ The Burgundian estab-

⁵¹ “Que bastarán para conquistar y ganar un reyno.” Cortes of Valladolid of 1558, pet. 4.