



**The Works Of the late Right Honorable Henry St. John,  
Lord Viscount Bolingbroke**

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**Bolingbroke, Henry St. John**

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Letter VI. From what period modern history is peculiarly useful to the service of our country, viz. From the end of fifteenth century to the present. The division of this into three particular ...

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OF THE  
STUDY of HISTORY.

LETTER VI.

From what period modern history is peculiarly useful to the service of our country, viz.

From the end of the fifteenth century to the present.

The division of this into three particular periods :

In order to a sketch of the history and state of Europe from that time.

**S**INCE then you are, my lord, by your birth, by the nature of our government, and by the talents God has given you, attached for life to the service of your country ; since genius alone cannot enable you to go through this service with honor to yourself and advantage to your country, whether you support or whether you oppose the administrations that arise ; since a great stock of knowledge, acquired betimes and continually improved, is necessary to this end ; and since one part of this stock must be collected from the study of history, as the other part is to be gained by observation and experience ;

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I come now to speak to your lordship of such history as has an immediate relation to the great duty and business of your life, and of the method to be observed in this study. The notes I have by me, which were of some little use thus far, serve me no farther, and I have no books to consult. No matter; I shall be able to explain my thoughts without their assistance, and less liable to be tedious. I hope to be as full and as exact on memory alone, as the manner in which I shall treat the subject requires me to be.

I SAY then, that however closely affairs are linked together in the progression of governments, and how much soever events that follow are dependent on those that precede, the whole connexion diminishes to sight as the chain lengthens; till at last it seems to be broken, and the links that are continued from that point bear no proportion nor any similitude to the former. I would not be understood to speak only of those great changes, that are wrought by a concurrence of extraordinary events; for instance the expulsion of one nation, the destruction of one government, and the establishment of another: but even of those that are wrought in the same governments and among the same people, slowly and almost imperceptibly, by the necessary effects of time, and flux condition of human affairs. When such changes as these happen in several states about the same time, and consequently affect other states by their vicinity, and by many different relations which they frequently bear to one another; then is one of those periods formed, at which the chain spoken of is so broken as to have little or no real or visible connexion with that which we see continue. A new situation, different from the former, begets new interests in the same proportion of difference; not in this or that particular state alone, but in all those that are concerned by vicinity or other relations, as I said just now,  
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in one general system of policy. New interests beget new maxims of government, and new methods of conduct. These, in their turns, beget new manners, new habits, new customs. The longer this new constitution of affairs continues, the more will this difference increase: and altho some analogy may remain long between what preceded and what succeeds such a period, yet will this analogy soon become an object of mere curiosity, not of profitable enquiry. Such a period therefore is, in the true sense of the words, an epocha or an aera, a point of time at which you stop, or from which you reckon forward. I say forward; because we are not to study in the present case, as chronologers compute, backward. Should we persist to carry our researehes much higher, and to push them even to some other period of the same kind, we should misemploy our time; the causes then laid having spent themselves, the series of effects derived from them being over, and our concern in both consequently at an end. But a new system of causes and effects, that subsists in our time, and whereof our conduct is to be a part, arising at the last period, and all that passes in our time being dependent on what has passed since that period, or being immediately relative to it, we are extremely concerned to be well informed about all those passages. To be entirely ignorant about the ages that precede this aera would be shameful. Nay some indulgence may be had to a temperate curiosity in the review of them. But to be learned about them is a ridiculous affectation in any man who means to be useful to the present age. Down to this aera let us read history: from this aera, and down to our own time, let us study it.

THE end of the fifteenth century seems to be just such a period as I have been describing, for those who live in the eighteenth, and who inhabit the western parts of Europe. A little

little before, or a little after this point of time, all those events happened, and all those revolutions began, that have produced so vast a change in the manners, customs, and interests of particular nations, and in the whole policy, ecclesiastical and civil, of these parts of the world. I must descend here into some detail, not of histories, collections, or memorials; for all these are well enough known: and tho' the contents are in the heads of few, the books are in the hands of many. But instead of shewing your lordship where to look, I shall contribute more to your entertainment and instruction, by marking out, as well as my memory will serve me to do it, what you are to look for, and by furnishing a kind of clue to your studies. I shall give, according to custom, the first place to religion.

A view of the ecclesiastical government of Europe from the beginning of the sixteenth century.

OBSERVE then, my lord, that the demolition of the papal throne was not attempted with success till the beginning of the sixteenth century. If you are curious to cast your eyes back, you will find BERENGER in the eleventh, who was soon silenced; ARNOLDUS in the same, who was soon hanged; VALDO in the twelfth, and our WICKLIFF in the fourteenth, as well as others perhaps whom I do not recollect. Sometimes the doctrines of the church were alone attacked; and sometimes the doctrine, the discipline, and the usurpations of the pope. But little fires, kindled in corners of a dark world, were soon stifled by that great abettor of christian unity, the hangman. When they spread and blazed out, as in the case of the Albigois and of the Hussites, armies were raised to extinguish them by torrents of blood; and such saints as DOMINIC, with the

crucifix in their hands, instigated the troops to the utmost barbarity. Your lordship will find that the church of Rome was maintained by such charitable and salutary means, among others, till the period spoken of: and you will be curious, I am sure, to enquire how this period came to be more fatal to her than any former conjuncture. A multitude of circumstances, which you will easily trace in the histories of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, to go no further back, concurred to bring about this great event: and a multitude of others, as easy to be traced, concurred to hinder the demolition from becoming total, and to prop the tottering fabric. Among these circumstances, there is one less complicated and more obvious than others, which was of principal and universal influence. The art of printing had been invented about forty or fifty years before the period we fix: from that time, the resurrection of letters hastened on a-pace; and at this period they had made great progress, and were cultivated with great application. MAHOMET the second drove them out of the east into the west; and the popes proved worse politicians than the muslies in this respect. NICHOLAS the fifth encouraged learning and learned men. SIXTUS the fourth was, if I mistake not, a great collector of books at least: and LEO the tenth was the patron of every art and science. The magicians themselves broke the charm by which they had bound mankind for so many ages: and the adventure of that knight-errant, who, thinking himself happy in the arms of a celestial nymph, found that he was the miserable slave of an infernal hag, was in some sort renewed. As soon as the means of acquiring and spreading information grew common, it is no wonder that a system was unravelled, which could not have been woven with success in any ages, but those of gross ignorance, and credulous superstition. I might point out to your lordship many other immediate causes, some general like this that

that I have mentioned, and some particular. The great schism, for instance, that ended in the beginning of the fifteenth century, and in the council of Constance, had occasioned prodigious scandal. Two or three vicars of CHRIST, two or three infallible heads of the church roaming about the world at a time, furnished matter of ridicule as well as scandal: and whilst they appealed, for so they did in effect, to the laity, and reproached and excommunicated one another, they taught the world what to think of the institution, as well as exercise of the papal authority. The same lesson was taught by the council of Pisa, that preceded, and by that of Basle, that followed the council of Constance. The horrid crimes of ALEXANDER the sixth, the sawcy ambition of JULIUS the second, the immense profusion and scandalous exactions of LEO the tenth; all these events and characters, following in a continued series from the beginning of one century, prepared the way for the revolution that happened in the beginning of the next. The state of Germany, the state of England, and that of the North, were particular causes, in these several countries, of this revolution. Such were many remarkable events that happened about the same time, and a little before it, in these and in other nations; and such were likewise the characters of many of the princes of that age, some of whom favored the reformation, like the elector of Saxony, on a principle of conscience; and most of whom favored it, just as others opposed it, on a principle of interest. This your lordship will discover manifestly to have been the case; and the sole difference you will find between HENRY the eighth and FRANCIS the first, one of whom separated from the pope, as the other adhered to him, is this: HENRY the eighth divided, with the secular clergy and his people, the spoil of the pope, and his satellites, the monks; FRANCIS the first divided, with the pope, the spoil of his clergy, secular and regular, and of his people.

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With the same impartial eye that your lordship surveys the abuses of religion, and the corruptions of the church as well as court of Rome, which brought on the reformation at this period; you will observe the characters and conduct of those who began, who propagated, and who favored the reformation: and from your observation of these, as well as of the unsystematical manner in which it was carried on at the same time in various places, and of the want of concert, nay even of charity, among the reformers, you will learn what to think of the several religions that unite in their opposition to the Roman, and yet hate one another most heartily; what to think of the several sects that have sprouted, like suckers, from the same great roots; and what the true principles are of protestant ecclesiastical policy. This policy had no being till LUTHER made his establishment in Germany; till ZWINGLIUS began another in Swisserland, which CALVIN carried on, and, like AMERICUS VESPUTIUS who followed CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS, robbed the first adventurer of his honor; and till the reformation in our country was perfected under EDWARD the sixth and ELIZABETH. Even popish ecclesiastical policy is no longer the same since that aera. His holiness is no longer at the head of the whole western church: and to keep the part that adheres to him, he is obliged to loosen their chains, and to lighten his yoke. The spirit and pretensions of his court are the same, but not the power. He governs by expedient and management more, and by authority less. His decrees and his briefs are in danger of being refused, explained away, or evaded, unless he negotiates their acceptance before he gives them, governs in concert with his flock, and feeds his sheep according to their humor and interest. In short, his excommunications, that made the greatest emperors tremble, are despised by the lowest members of his own communion; and the remaining attachment to him has been, from this aera,

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rather a political expedient to preserve an appearance of unity, than a principle of conscience; whatever some bigotted princes may have thought, whatever ambitious prelates and hireling scriblers may have taught, and whatever a people, worked up to enthusiasm by fanatical preachers, may have acted. Proofs of this would be easy to draw, not only from the conduct of such princes as FERDINAND the first and MAXIMILIAN the second, who could scarce be esteemed papists tho they continued in the pope's communion; but even from that of princes who persecuted their protestant subjects with great violence. Enough has been said, I think, to shew your lordship how little need there is of going up higher than the beginning of the sixteenth century in the study of history, to acquire all the knowledge necessary at this time in ecclesiastical policy, or in civil policy as far as it is relative to this. Historical monuments of this sort are in every man's hand, the facts are sufficiently verified, and the entire scenes lie open to our observation: even that scene of solemn refined banter exhibited in the council of Trent, imposes on no man who reads PAOLO, as well as PALLAVICINI, and the letters of VARGAS.

A view of the civil government of Europe in the beginning of the sixteenth century.

I. In FRANCE.

A VERY little higher need we go, to observe those great changes in the civil constitutions of the principal nations of Europe, in the partition of power among them, and by consequence in the whole system of European policy, which have operated so strongly for more than two centuries, and which operate still. I will not affront the memory of our HENRY the

the seventh so much as to compare him to LEWIS the eleventh : and yet I perceive some resemblance between them ; which would perhaps appear greater, if PHILIP of Commines had wrote the history of HENRY as well as that of LEWIS ; or if my lord BACON had wrote that of LEWIS as well as that of HENRY. This prince came to the crown of England a little before the close of the fifteenth century : and LEWIS began his reign in France about twenty years sooner. These reigns make remarkable periods in the histories of both nations. To reduce the power, privileges, and possessions of the nobility, and to increase the wealth and authority of the crown, was the principal object of both. In this their success was so great, that the constitutions of the two governments have had, since that time, more resemblance, in name and in form than in reality, to the constitutions that prevailed before. LEWIS the eleventh was the first, say the French, “ qui mit les rois hors de page.” The independency of the nobility had rendered the state of his predecessors very dependent, and their power precarious. They were the sovereigns of great vassals ; but these vassals were so powerful, that one of them was sometimes able, and two or three of them always, to give law to the sovereign. Before LEWIS came to the crown, the English had been driven out of their possessions in France, by the poor character of HENRY the sixth, the domestic troubles of his reign, and the defection of the house of Burgundy from his alliance, much more than by the ability of CHARLES the seventh, who seems to have been neither a greater hero nor a greater politician than HENRY the sixth ; and even than by the vigor and union of the French nobility in his service. After LEWIS came to the crown, EDWARD the fourth made a shew of carrying the war again into France ; but he soon returned home, and your lordship will not be at a loss to find much better reasons for his doing so, in the situation of his affairs and the characters  
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of his allies, than those which PHILIP of Commines draws from the artifice of LEWIS, from his good cheer, and his pensions. Now from this time our pretensions on France were in effect given up: and CHARLES the bold, the last prince of the house of Burgundy, being killed, LEWIS had no vassal able to molest him. He re-united the dutchy of Burgundy and Artois to his crown, he acquired Provence by gift, and his son Britany by marriage: and thus France grew, in the course of a few years, into that great and compact body which we behold at this time. The history of France, before this period, is like that of Germany, a complicated history of several states and several interests; sometimes concurring like members of the same monarchy, and sometimes warring on one another. Since this period, the history of France is the history of one state under a more uniform and orderly government; the history of a monarchy wherein the prince is possessor of some, as well as lord of all the great fiefes: and, the authority of many tyrants centering in one, tho the people are not become more free, yet the whole system of domestic policy is entirely changed. Peace at home is better secured, and the nation grown fitter to carry war abroad. The governors of great provinces and of strong fortresses have opposed their king, and taken arms against his authority and commission since that time: but yet there is no more resemblance between the authority and pretensions of these governors, or the nature and occasions of these disputes, and the authority and pretensions of the vassals of the crown in former days, or the nature and occasions of their disputes with the prince and with one another, than there is between the antient and the present peers of France. In a word, the constitution is so altered, that any knowledge we can acquire about it in the history that precedes this period, will serve to little purpose in our study of the history that follows it, and to less purpose

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purpose still in assisting us to judge of what passes in the present age. The kings of France since that time, more masters at home, have been able to exert themselves more abroad: and they began to do so immediately; for CHARLES the eighth, son and successor of LEWIS the eleventh, formed great designs of foreign conquests, tho they were disappointed by his inability, by the levity of the nation, and by other causes. LEWIS the twelfth and FRANCIS the first, but especially FRANCIS, meddled deep in the affairs of Europe: and tho the superior genius of Ferdinand called the catholic, and the star of CHARLES the fifth prevailed against them, yet the efforts they made shew sufficiently how the strength and importance of this monarchy were increased in their time. From whence we may date likewise the rivalship of the house of France, for we may reckon that of Valois and that of Bourbon as one upon this occasion, and the house of Austria; that continues at this day, and that has cost so much blood and so much treasure in the course of it.

## II. In E N G L A N D.

THO the power and influence of the nobility sunk in the great change that began under HENRY the seventh in England, as they did in that which began under LEWIS the eleventh in France; yet the new constitutions that these changes produced were very different. In France the lords alone lost, the king alone gained; the clergy held their possessions and their immunities, and the people remained in a state of mitigated slavery. But in England the people gained as well as the crown. The commons had already a share in the legislature; so that the power and influence of the lords being broke by HENRY the seventh, and the property of the commons increasing

creasing by the sale that his son made of church-lands, the power of the latter increased of course by this change in a constitution, the forms whereof were favorable to them. The union of the roses put an end to the civil wars of York and Lancaster, that had succeeded those we commonly call the barons wars, and the humor of warring in France, that had lasted near four hundred years under the Normans and Plantagenets, for plunder as well as conquest, was spent. Our temple of JANUS was shut by HENRY the seventh. We neither laid waste our own nor other countries any longer: and wise laws and a wise government changed insensibly the manners, and gave a new turn to the spirit of our people. We were no longer the free-booters we had been. Our nation maintained her reputation in arms whenever the public interest or the public authority required it; but war ceased to be, what it had been, our principal and almost our sole profession. The arts of peace prevailed among us. We became husbandmen, manufacturers, and merchants, and we emulated neighboring nations in literature. It is from this time that we ought to study the history of our country, my lord, with the utmost application. We are not much concerned to know with critical accuracy what were the antient forms of our parliaments, concerning which, however, there is little room for dispute from the reign of HENRY the third at least; nor in short the whole system of our civil constitution before HENRY the seventh, and of our ecclesiastical constitution before HENRY the eighth. But he who has not studied and acquired a thorough knowledge of them both, from these periods down to the present time, in all the variety of events by which they have been affected, will be very unfit to judge or take care of either. Just as little are we concerned to know, in any nice detail, what the conduct of our princes, relatively to our neighbours on the continent, was before this period, and at a time

when the partition of power and a multitude of other circumstances rendered the whole political system of Europe so vastly different from that which has existed since. But he who has not traced this conduct from the period we fix, down to the present age, wants a principal part of the knowledge that every English minister of state should have. Ignorance in the respects here spoken of is the less pardonable, because we have more, and more authentic, means of information concerning this, than concerning any other period. Anecdotes enow to glut the curiosity of some persons, and to silence all the captious cavils of others, will never be furnished by any portion of history; nor indeed can they according to the nature and course of human affairs: but he who is content to read and observe, like a senator and a statesman, will find in our own and in foreign historians as much information as he wants, concerning the affairs of our island, her fortune at home and her conduct abroad, from the fifteenth century to the eighteenth. I refer to foreign historians, as well as to our own, for this series of our own history; not only because it is reasonable to see in what manner the historians of other countries have related the transactions wherein we have been concerned, and what judgment they have made of our conduct, domestic and foreign, but for another reason likewise. Our nation has furnished as ample and as important matter, good and bad, for history, as any nation under the sun: and yet we must yield the palm in writing history most certainly to the Italians and to the French, and, I fear, even to the Germans. The only two pieces of history we have, in any respect to be compared with the antient, are, the Reign of HENRY the seventh by my lord BACON, and the History of our civil wars in the last century by your noble ancestor my lord chancellor CLARENDON. But we have no general history to be compared with some of other countries: neither have we, which I lament much more, particular

ticular histories, except the two I have mentioned, nor writers of memorials, nor collectors of monuments and anecdotes, to vie in number or in merit with those that foreign nations can boast; from COMMINES, GUICCIARDIN, DU BELLAY, PAOLO, DAVILA, THUANUS, and a multitude of others, down through the whole period that I propose to your lordship. But altho this be true, to our shame; yet it is true likewise that we want no necessary means of information. They lie open to our industry and our discernment. Foreign writers are for the most part scarce worth reading when they speak of our domestic affairs; nor are our English writers for the most part of greater value when they speak of foreign affairs. In this mutual defect, the writers of other countries are, I think, more excusable than ours: for the nature of our government, the political principles in which we are bred, our distinct interests as islanders, and the complicated various interests and humors of our parties, all these are so peculiar to ourselves, and so different from the notions, manners, and habits of other nations, that it is not wonderful they should be puzzled or should fall into error, when they undertake to give relations of events that result from all these, or to pass any judgment upon them. But as these historians are mutually defective, so they mutually supply each other's defects. We must compare them therefore, make use of our discernment, and draw our conclusions from both. If we proceed in this manner, we have an ample fund of history in our power, from whence to collect sufficient authentic information; and we must proceed in this manner, even with our own historians of different religions, sects, and parties, or run the risque of being misled by domestic ignorance and prejudice in this case, as well as by foreign ignorance and prejudice in the other.

## III. In SPAIN and the EMPIRE.

SPAIN figured little in Europe till the latter part of the fifteenth century; till Castile and Arragon were united by the marriage of FERDINAND and ISABELLA; till the total expulsion of the Moors, and till the discovery of the West-Indies. After this, not only Spain took a new form, and grew into immense power; but, the heir of FERDINAND and ISABELLA being heir likewise of the houses of Burgundy and Austria, such an extent of dominion accrued to him by all these successions, and such an addition of rank and authority by his election to the empire, as no prince had been master of in Europe from the days of CHARLES the great. It is proper to observe here how the policy of the Germans altered in the choice of an emperor; because the effects of this alteration have been great. When RODOLPHUS of Hapsburg was chose in the year one thousand two hundred and seventy, or about that time, the poverty and the low estate of this prince, who had been marshal of the court to a king of Bohemia, was an inducement to elect him. The disorderly and lawless state of the empire made the princes of it in those days unwilling to have a more powerful head. But a contrary maxim took place at this aera: CHARLES the fifth and FRANCIS the first, the two most powerful princes of Europe, were the sole candidates; for the elector of Saxony, who is said to have declined, was rather unable to stand in competition with them: and CHARLES was chosen by the unanimous suffrages of the electoral college, if I mistake not. Another CHARLES, CHARLES the fourth, who was made emperor illegally enough on the deposition of LEWIS of Bavaria, and about one hundred and fifty years before, seems to me to have contributed doubly to establish this maxim; by the wise constitutions that he procured to pass, that



that united the empire in a more orderly form and better system of government; and by alienating the imperial revenues to such a degree, that they were no longer sufficient to support an emperor who had not great revenues of his own. The same maxim and other circumstances have concurred to keep the empire in this family ever since, as it had been often before; and this family having large dominions in the empire, and larger pretensions, as well as dominions, out of it, the other states of Europe, France, Spain and England particularly, have been more concerned since this period in the affairs of Germany, than they were before it: and by consequence the history of Germany, from the beginning of the sixteenth century, is of importance, and a necessary part of that knowledge which your lordship desires to acquire.

THE Dutch commonwealth was not formed till near a century later. But as soon as it was formed, nay even whilst it was forming, these provinces, that were lost to observation among the many that composed the dominions of Burgundy and Austria, became so considerable a part of the political system of Europe, that their history must be studied by every man who would inform himself of this system.

SOON after this state had taken being, others of a more ancient original began to mingle in those disputes and wars, those councils, negotiations, and treaties, that are to be the principal objects of your lordship's application in the study of history. That of the northern crowns deserves your attention little, before the last century. Till the election of FREDERIC the first to the crown of Denmark, and till that wonderful revolution which the first GUSTAVUS brought about in Sweden, it is nothing more than a confused rhapsody of events, in which the great kingdoms and states of Europe neither had any concern;

concern, nor took any part. From the time I have mentioned, the northern crowns have turned their counfels and their arms often southwards, and Sweden particularly, with prodigious effect.

To what purpose should I trouble your lordship with the mention of histories of other nations? They are either such as have no relation to the knowledge you would acquire, like that of the Poles, the Muscovites, or the Turks; or they are such as, having an occasional or a secondary relation to it, fall of course into your scheme; like the history of Italy for instance, which is sometimes a part of that of France, sometimes of that of Spain, and sometimes of that of Germany. The thread of history that you are to keep, is that of the nations who are and must always be concerned in the same scenes of action with your own. These are the principal nations of the west. Things that have no immediate relation to your own country, or to them, are either too remote, or too minute, to employ much of your time: and their history and your own is, for all your purposes, the whole history of Europe.

THE two great powers, that of France and that of Austria, being formed, and a rivalship established by consequence between them; it began to be the interest of their neighbors to oppose the strongest and most enterprising of the two, and to be the ally and friend of the weakest. From hence arose the notion of a balance of power in Europe, on the equal poize of which the safety and tranquillity of all must depend. To destroy the equality of this balance has been the aim of each of these rivals in his turn: and to hinder it from being destroyed, by preventing too much power from falling into one scale, has been the principle of all the wise councils of

of Europe, relatively to France and to the house of Austria, through the whole period that began at the aera we have fixed, and subsists at this hour. To make a careful and just observation, therefore, of the rise and decline of these powers, in the two last centuries and in the present; of the projects which their ambition formed; of the means they employed to carry these projects on with success; of the means employed by others to defeat them; of the issue of all these endeavors in war and in negotiation; and particularly, to bring your observations home to your own country and your own use, of the conduct that England held, to her honor or dishonor, to her advantage or disadvantage, in every one of the numerous and important conjunctures that happened----ought to be the principal subject of your lordship's attention in reading and reflecting on this part of modern history.

Now to this purpose you will find it of great use, my lord, when you have a general plan of the history in your mind, to go over the whole again in another method; which I propose to be this. Divide the entire period into such particular periods as the general course of affairs will mark out to you sufficiently, by the rise of new conjunctures, of different schemes of conduct, and of different theatres of action. Examine this period of history as you would examine a tragedy or a comedy; that is, take first the idea or a general notion of the whole, and after that examine every act and every scene apart. Consider them in themselves, and consider them relatively to one another. Read this history as you would that of any antient period; but study it afterwards, as it would not be worth your while to study the other; nay as you could not have in your power the means of studying the other, if the study was really worth your while. The former part of this period abounds in great historians: and the latter part

is so modern, that even tradition is authentic enough to supply the want of good history, if we are curious to enquire, and if we hearken to the living with the same impartiality and freedom of judgment as we read the dead; and he that does one, will do the other. The whole period abounds in memorials, in collections of public acts and monuments, of private letters, and of treaties. All these must come into your plan of study, my lord: many not to be red through, but all to be consulted and compared. They must not lead you, I think, to your enquiries, but your enquiries must lead you to them. By joining history and that which we call the *materia historica* together in this manner, and by drawing your information from both, your lordship will acquire not only that knowledge, which many have in some degree, of the great transactions that have passed, and the great events that have happened in Europe during this period, and of their immediate and obvious causes and consequences; but your lordship will acquire a much superior knowledge, and such a one as very few men possess almost in any degree, a knowledge of the true political system of Europe during this time. You will see it in it's primitive principles, in the constitutions of governments, the situations of countries, their national and true interests, the characters and the religion of people, and other permanent circumstances. You will trace it through all its fluctuations, and observe how the objects vary seldom, but the means perpetually, according to the different characters of princes and of those who govern; the different abilities of those who serve; the course of accidents, and a multitude of other irregular and contingent circumstances.

THE particular periods into which the whole period should be divided, in my opinion, are these. 1. From the fifteenth to the end of the sixteenth century. 2. From thence to the

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the Pyrenean treaty. 3. From thence down to the present time.

YOUR lordship will find this division as apt and as proper, relatively to the particular histories of England, France, Spain, and Germany, the principal nations concerned, as it is relatively to the general history of Europe.

THE death of queen ELIZABETH, and the accession of king JAMES the first, made a vast alteration in the government of our nation at home, and in her conduct abroad, about the end of the first of these periods. The wars that religion occasioned, and ambition fomented in France, through the reigns of FRANCIS the second, CHARLES the ninth, HENRY the third, and a part of HENRY the fourth, ended: and the furies of the league were crushed by this great prince, about the same time. PHILIP the second of Spain marks this period likewise by his death, and by the exhausted condition in which he left the monarchy he governed: which took the lead no longer in disturbing the peace of mankind, but acted a second part in abetting the bigotry and ambition of FERDINAND the second and the third. The thirty years war that devastated Germany did not begin till the eighteenth year of the seventeenth century, but the seeds of it were sowing some time before, and even at the end of the sixteenth. FERDINAND the first and MAXIMILIAN had shewn much lenity and moderation in the disputes and troubles that arose on account of religion. Under RODOLPHUS and MATTHIAS, as the succession of their cousin FERDINAND approached, the fires that were covered began to smoke and to sparkle: and if the war did not begin with this century, the preparation for it, and the expectation of it did.

THE second period ends in one thousand six hundred and sixty, the year of the restoration of CHARLES the second to the throne of England; when our civil wars, and all the disorders which CROMWELL's usurpation had produced, were over; and therefore a remarkable point of time, with respect to our country. It is no less remarkable with respect to Germany, Spain, and France.

As to Germany; the ambitious projects of the German branch of Austria had been entirely defeated, the peace of the empire had been restored, and almost a new constitution formed, or an old one revived, by the treaties of Westphalia; nay the imperial eagle was not only fallen, but her wings were clipped.

As to Spain; the Spanish branch was fallen as low twelve years afterwards, that is, in the year one thousand six hundred and sixty. PHILIP the second left his successors a ruined monarchy. He left them something worse; he left them his example and his principles of government, founded in ambition, in pride, in ignorance, in bigotry, and all the pedantry of state. I have read somewhere or other, that the war of the Low Countries alone cost him, by his own confession, five hundred and sixty four millions, a prodigious sum in what species soever he reckoned. PHILIP the third and PHILIP the fourth followed his example and his principles of government, at home and abroad. At home, there was much form, but no good order, no oeconomy, nor wisdom of policy in the state. The church continued to devour the state, and that monster the inquisition to dispeople the country, even more than perpetual war, and all the numerous colonies that Spain had sent to the West-Indies: for your lordship will find that PHILIP the third drove more than nine hundred thousand Moriscoes

riscoes out of his dominions by one edict, with such circumstances of inhumanity in the execution of it, as Spaniards alone could exercise, and that tribunal, who had provoked this unhappy race to revolt, could alone approve. Abroad, the conduct of these princes was directed by the same wild spirit of ambition: rash in undertaking tho slow to execute, and obstinate in pursuing tho unable to succeed, they opened a new sluice to let out the little life and vigor that remained in their monarchy. PHILIP the second is said to have been piqued against his uncle FERDINAND, for refusing to yield the empire to him on the abdication of CHARLES the fifth. Certain it is, that as much as he loved to disturb the peace of mankind, and to meddle in every quarrel that had the appearance of supporting the Roman and oppressing every other church, he meddled little in the affairs of Germany. But, FERDINAND and MAXIMILIAN dead, and the off-spring of MAXIMILIAN extinct, the kings of Spain espoused the interests of the other branch of their family, entertained remote views of ambition in favor of their own branch, even on that side, and made all the enterprises of FERDINAND of Gratz, both before and after his elevation to the empire, the common cause of the house of Austria. What completed their ruin was this: they knew not how to lose, nor when to yield. They acknowledged the independency of the Dutch commonwealth, and became the allies of their antient subjects at the treaty of Munster: but they would not forego their usurped claim on Portugal, and they persisted to carry on singly the war against France. Thus they were reduced to such a lowness of power as can hardly be paralleled in any other case: and PHILIP the fourth was obliged at last to conclude a peace, on terms repugnant to his inclination, to that of his people, to the interest of Spain, and to that of all Europe, in the Pyrenean treaty.

As to France; this aera of the entire fall of the Spanish power is likewise that from which we may reckon that France grew as formidable, as we have seen her, to her neighbours, in power and pretensions. HENRY the fourth meditated great designs, and prepared to act a great part in Europe in the very beginning of this period, when RAVAILLAC stabbed him. His designs died with him, and are rather guessed at than known; for surely those which his historian PÉREFIXE and the compilers of SULLY's memorials ascribe to him, of a christian commonwealth, divided into fifteen states, and of a senate to decide all differences, and to maintain this new constitution of Europe, are too chimerical to have been really his: but his general design of abasing the house of Austria, and establishing the superior power in that of Bourbon, was taken up, about twenty years after his death, by RICHELIEU, and was pursued by him and by MAZARIN with so much ability and success, that it was effected entirely by the treaties of Westphalia and by the Pyrenean treaty; that is, at the end of the second of those periods I have presumed to propose to your lordship.

WHEN the third, in which we now are, will end, and what circumstances will mark the end of it, I know not: but this I know, that the great events and revolutions, which have happened in the course of it, interest us still more nearly than those of the two precedent periods. I intended to have drawn up an elenchus or summary of the three, but I doubted, on further reflection, whether my memory would enable me to do it with exactness enough: and I saw that, if I was able to do it, the deduction would be immeasurably long. Something of this kind however it may be reasonable to attempt, in speaking of the last period: which



which may hereafter occasion a further trouble to your lordship.

BUT to give you some breathing-time, I will postpone it at present, and am in the mean while,

My LORD,

Your, &c.

LETTER