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The French town of La Rochelle was the scene of a power test between the state (led by Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu) and the Huguenots (as French Protestants were known). The government besieged the Huguenot town of La Rochelle between 1627-28. This image depicts a painting, by Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796-1875), providing us with a view of the La Rochelle harbor as it appeared in 1851. The oil-on-canvas is now maintained at the Yale University Art Gallery; image online via Wikimedia Commons.

George Villiers was a man with a past. A favorite of James I (of England) and VI (of Scotland), his rise to rank and power had been "meteoric." Not a few people speculated (and gossiped) about his real relationship with the king (whose mother was the executed Mary, Queen of Scots). Surviving letters from James I/VI to Villiers add credence to such rumors.

When the King created a special peerage for Villiers, conferring on him the new landed title of Duke of Buckingham, many people were upset. Near the end of his life, James had effectively given Buckingham the power to run England. Disregarding the concerns of Parliament, the monarch alienated his subjects. It is said he was "unlamented" when he died in 1625.

After Charles I took the throne of England and Scotland, following his father's death of a stroke, Buckingham's influence continued. So did problems with Parliament whose members were upset with flagrant royal spending and bad foreign policy.

Adding to the trouble was Charles' arranged marriage to Henrietta-Marie, the 15-year-old daughter of Henri IV and Marie de Medici. A devout French Catholic, the new queen was not a welcome addition at the English court.

Buckingham, meanwhile, continued to exert influence (mostly bad) and amass wealth and power (including lands in Ireland). His marriage to Lady Katharine Manners (the richest heiress in England) produced a son (George, later the 2nd Duke of Buckingham) and a daughter (Mary), but it wasn't a good match. It is said that Buckingham commissioned a painting by Sir Anthony Van Dyck to reflect the sad state of the Villiers' marriage.

When Charles I decided to help the Huguenots of La Rochelle, he sent Buckingham (referred to in Parliament as the "grievance of grievances") to lead the expedition. It was—to put it mildly—a disastrous move.

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La Rochelle - The Harbor

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George Villiers

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George - Second Duke of Buckingham

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