

the most important export of England; Flanders bought the wool, made fine cloth, and sold it to England. This interruption to trade stopped the work of the Flemish weavers, and seriously interfered with the business of both countries. The French king was also attempting to gain control of Flanders, and if he succeeded, English trade with that country would be crippled.

Philip, king of France, now seized Aquitaine and refused to surrender it to Edward. The English king, on his part, put forth a claim to the throne of France on the ground that he was the rightful heir, as his mother, Isabella, was a sister of the late king, while Philip was only a cousin. The French asserted that, under their law, no woman could either rule in France, or transmit the crown to her son; this, however, Edward refused to admit. The war to secure the throne of France for an English king began in 1338 and lasted, with some intervals, for over one hundred years.

The first battle of the war was for the mastery of the Channel, in order that the wool trade with Flanders might be carried on with safety. The English gathered a strong fleet, and in 1340 attacked the French off Sluys, on the Netherland coast. In the battle that followed, the French were defeated with great loss. No man dared tell the news to Philip until his court jester said, "Those English are terrible cowards." "Why?" said Philip. "Because they were afraid to leap into the sea as our brave French did," said the clown.

Six years later, Edward landed in Normandy, ravaged the country, and then began a march across France to join his allies in Flanders. Philip pursued, and the English army awaited attack at Crécy, where in 1346 was fought one of the most famous battles of English history. The French king was depending mainly on his mounted knights, clad in armour, who fought with sword and lance. He had also fifteen thousand Genoese archers, who fought with the crossbow, an awkward weapon, which had to be wound up with wheel and ratchet to set the string every time it was discharged. The English archers, who formed the main body of Edward's army used the