



Prince and Heretic

Marjorie Bowen

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(1914)

Marjorie Bowen

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"Soevis tranquillis in undis"

—Motto Of William Of Orange

PART I - The Netherlanders

"On respondera qu'il est Roi: je dis au contraire que ce nom de Roi m'est incognu. Qu'il le soit en Castille ou Arragon, à Naples, aux Indes et par tout ou il commande à plaisir: qu'il le soit s'il veult en Jérusalem, paisible Dominateur en Asie et Afrique, tant y a que je ne cogni en ce pais qu'un Due et un Comte, duquel la puissance est limitée selon nos privilèges lesquels il a juré à la joyeuse entrée."

--Apologie d'Orange

I - THE ALCHEMIST

Magister Gustave Vanderlinden, astrologer and alchemist to that great Protestant Prince, His Highness Augustus, Elector of Saxony, sat somewhat gloomily in the laboratory of his house at Leipsic.

It was August, and the sun fell merrily through the diamond panes of the casements on to the dusty and mysterious objects which filled the high and narrow chamber.

In one corner stood a large furnace with two ovens, a tripod and pot, and a wide chimney above; on the shelves near, on the ground, and on the fire were all manner of vessels and pots and retorts of glass, of porcelain, and of metal.

Near by stood a large quadrant, beautifully engraved, a huge celestial globe swung in a frame of polished ebony, a small telescope of brass and wood, and a little desk or table covered with curious objects such as compasses, a large portion of loadstone, several seals, drawings, diagrams, and charts.

The other end of the room was occupied by a large and fine clock of very exact workmanship, and two shelves of rare books and manuscripts in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, English, French, German, and High Dutch.

Beyond, a door opened into an inner room stored with chemicals, vases, jars, and boxes in considerable confusion. The owner of this apartment was a man in the prime of life, tall and spare, wearing a long, plain, frieze gown and a flat black velvet bonnet, round his neck hung a charm consisting of several Hebrew letters on a fine gold chain; his face was thin, and his expression discontented and weary.

He was, indeed, an unsatisfied man; though he held a good position at the Electoral Court, and the Elector never undertook any action without consulting his charts, it was neither in philosophy nor astrology that his interest lay. He was an alchemist, and his life was devoted to the *magnum opus*--the discovery of the wonderful stone which should heal all diseases, turn all metal to gold fairer than that found in the earth, and confer eternal youth--the secret of secrets of Aristotle, the goal of Hermetic philosophy.

He had traversed the greater part of Europe on this quest, and even travelled in the East, gaining much curious knowledge and meeting other Hermetic philosophers, but twenty years of wandering had brought him no nearer his object, and poverty had driven him to his native land and to the protection of the Elector.

Within the last few days an experiment which consisted of the combination of the essential mercury, silver, oil of olives, and sulphur--so many times distilled, rectified, dissolved, and fused, that the process had taken three years--had utterly failed in the final projections, and the baffled alchemist was struggling with a despair not unminged with bitterness, the bitterness of the continued barrenness of his long, earnest, and painful labours.

He was roused from his weary, almost apathetic musings by one of his assistants coming to tell him the Elector was below. Vanderlinden rose with a sigh, pulled off his black cap, and went down into the humble parlour where His Highness waited.

"The experiment?" asked the Elector, as the philosopher entered his presence.

"It has failed, Highness," replied Vanderlinden; he very much disliked discussing with a layman the Great Act, the holy and mysterious science, but could not refuse to do so with the patron who supplied the money for these experiments. To his present relief the Elector made no further comment on the eternal search for the philosopher's stone; he merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I did not come to talk of that," he said, "but of the wedding."

Vanderlinden repressed a sigh; there was no need to ask whose wedding his master referred to. To all Saxony, nay, to all Germany and the low countries, it was *the* wedding; it had been in debate for nearly three years, and during that period the Elector had consulted his astrologer so frequently on the likely success, failure, or general results of this union, that he had a whole cabinet of charts and diagrams by which the fortunes of the famous couple had been told according to every possible form of divination, and the chances, good and evil, of the marriage had been expounded in every possible way. Vanderlinden had discussed it, argued it with his master, drawn horoscopes of bride and groom, exhausted his skill in foretelling their future, and, therefore, he was heartily tired of the subject, and his spirits fell when he heard his master again introduce it. He wished the interview over and himself back at his books—he had suddenly recalled that in the works of Raymond Lully he had once seen a good formula for making the famous red and white

powder which is the first step towards the stone itself--but he had to conceal his impatience, for the marriage was as important to the Elector as the *magnum opus* was to the philosopher.

"Yes," continued His Highness, "I wish to be further heartened, encouraged, and advised about this marriage."

He leant back in his chair and keenly looked at the alchemist. He was a fine knight of great bodily strength and pleasing appearance, his expression and manner conveyed force and dignity and a kind of candid simplicity; he was a strict Protestant according to the Augsburg Confession, and, amid the confusion of creeds that then bewildered men, he stood out clearly as one of the foremost Princes of Germany to defy the Pope and support the Reformed Faith; this was his great, perhaps his only, distinction.

"I wish you," he added thoughtfully, "to draw me another chart, and to once more try if the numbers promise good luck or ill."

"Nay," replied Vanderlinden hastily, "I have done all that is possible, Highness; it is but folly to again and again search for an answer to the same question. By no method I tried did I get a result--therefore this marriage will mean confusion, or else the future of it is hid from us."

The Elector was not satisfied with this ambiguous answer; he wanted a definite reply from his oracles, a direct announcement from the fates.

He sat a little while gloomily, his blunt-featured face overcast, meanwhile the alchemist standing patiently before him, fingering the flat black cap.

"You know well enough," remarked the Prince at length, "that if I

could send some well-tested augury, some pleasant prophecy to the Landgrave of Hesse, it might overcome some of the bitterness of his opposition."

Vanderlinden doubted this; he had himself been sent as an envoy to Cassel with the mission of trying to persuade the old Landgrave to give his consent to this marriage that was so near the Elector's heart, and he had found Philip of Hesse extremely determined and not a little bigoted.

He ventured to say as much.

"I know," replied the Elector. "He has indeed made such a sturdy opposition that I have been tempted to wish him taken to his rest this last year."

"But why does Your Highness still trouble about the obstinacy of the Landgrave Philip when you have decided on the wedding, when the very cakes are being baked, the dresses made, and the groom is already on the road?" asked the alchemist wearily.

"I trouble," said His Highness, "because all the responsibility is mine, and it is no light responsibility to wed the daughter of the Elector Maurice to a Papist Prince."

Vanderlinden had heard the Elector say this many times before; he certainly thought that this match was about as incongruous as any could well be--an opinion shared by most of the Elector's subjects--for it meant uniting the Lady Anne, daughter of the Great Prince who had checked and humiliated Charles V, with a Romanist noble who had been page to that Emperor and was now high in favour with King Philip, his son; but the alchemist had, as did others, to bow to the reasons, personal and political, which had caused the Elector to urge on this marriage in face of the equally stern opposition of the

Romish King of Spain and the Protestant Landgrave of Hesse--the grandfather and part guardian of the bride. He therefore took refuge in a vague answer--

"Your Highness has successfully overcome all difficulties, and there is little use in repenting at the last minute--"

"I do not repent," interrupted the Elector, rising and frowning, "but I have taken a great deal on myself, and in such matters it is ill to stand alone."

The alchemist had no consolation to offer, no advice to give, since both advice and consolation had long ago been exhausted. It seemed, too, mere weakness on the part of the Elector to still be torturing himself with doubts as to the wisdom of a marriage which could not now be prevented.

"Have you ready the talisman for the bride?" asked the Elector abruptly.

Vanderlinden drew from the pocket of his robe a boxwood case about an inch square, and gave it to his master.

The Prince opened it and took out the jewel it contained: this was a triangle of gold to represent the Trinity, interclasped by a green enamel serpent, symbol of eternity (since it had its tail in its mouth and therefore neither beginning nor end), in the middle of the convolutions of the reptile was a clear diamond (for purity) set on a little square of virgin gold which bore the Hebrew letters signifying "God Guard Thee."

The Elector turned the curious little jewel, which was carefully and beautifully fashioned, about in his strong soldier's fingers and examined it with an air of approval.

"God grant," he said, in a tone of sincerity, "that this keep her from Popish errors and follies; but it is difficult for a young maid to stand alone in a foreign country and not follow the ways of it, eh, Vanderlinden?"

He placed the little case in the embroidered purse that hung at his waist, gave the alchemist a preoccupied farewell, and left the house with a heavy step and a little click of his long gilded spurs. Vanderlinden waited until he heard the clang of His Highness's horse's hoofs over the cobbles, then he returned to his laboratory.

One of his assistants, young Hans Gottman, was leaning from the window watching the departure of the Elector, another was heating over the clear furnace some clay vases sealed with lead.

Vanderlinden caught Hans Gottman by the white apron.

"Fetch me the manuscripts of Rhasis, Alfarabi and Geber," he said. "They are locked in the chest in the still-room."

Young Hans withdrew his head and shoulders from the window.

"You know those sages by heart, master," he replied, half in irony, half in flattery.

"True," replied Vanderlinden, "but there may be something the meaning of which I have not completely understood, and it is very necessary that we start another experiment at once."

"The last cost thirteen thousand thalers," remarked the young man doubtfully.

The alchemist frowned away this unpleasant truth. "Bring me also," he said, "*Le livre de la Philosophie Naturelle des Métaux* of

Bernard Trévisan, and the works of Raymond Lully."

But the young man still lingered; he was more interested in the world about him than in the science of his master.

"Did His Highness come about the marriage?" he asked.

The alchemist vented on his assistant the impatience he had concealed from the Prince.

"Am I never to hear the last of this marriage?" he cried. "I would the maid was wedded and gone, then maybe we should have a little peace in Leipsic."

"But it is a wicked thing," cried Hans, "to marry a Princess of the true faith to a Popish noble--a friend of King Philip, a friend of the Bishop of Arras--one who hates the Reformed Religion. I have some right to talk, master, for my father fought under the Elector Maurice against the late Emperor. Who thought then that the only child of the Elector would wed with the minion of the Emperor? A shame and a scandal it is to the country, and His Highness should be above sacrificing a young maid to the idolaters--"

Thus grumbling he went into the still-room to search for the manuscripts his master required. The other assistant, a stout young Burgundian, by name Walter de la Barre, had now brought his pots to the right heat and set them aside to cool.

He came forward, wiping his hands which were stained with clay and lead.

"Did the Elector command you to the feast, Magister?" he asked. "I heard to-day it was to be in the town hall, for the palace is not large enough and all attending are to bring their own butlers and cooks and plate, and there is to be a three days' tourney--"

"Walter! Walter!" interrupted Vanderlinden sternly. "Is it a wonder that your metals will not fuse, your minerals dissolve, that your liquids turn, and your furnaces fall out when your head is full of such idleness as this?"

"How often have I told you that it is the spirit and not the mind shall conquer in this pursuit of ours? Leave these worldly, silly things and fix your thoughts on the great mystery, the awful secret which God is pleased to withhold from us."

The young man flushed, and turned again to his furnace which he was keeping at white heat for the melting of more lead wherewith to seal a further row of pots containing a strange solution with which Vanderlinden was experimenting. Hans returned with the three rolls of manuscript and the book. The alchemist, with a severe injunction to them to keep up the furnace and refrain from idle speech, withdrew to his private chamber in the roof or gables, where he usually meditated and struggled with the problems he discovered in the mystical writings and oblique instructions, veiled hints and tortuous references of the ancient sages and masters.

The two young men, as soon as they were alone, at once went to the window and leant out, squeezing themselves together with some difficulty, for the casement was narrow.

The furnace made the chamber intolerably hot, and both sighed with relief at the comparative coolness of the summer breeze on their flushed faces.

Leipsic--roofs, gables, towers, spires--spread before them, pleasantly glimmering in the gold dust of the heat and softly outlined against the rich blue of the August sky.

There was an air of festival, of languor, of midsummer joyousness abroad, the little figures below in the street all looked as if they were making holiday; it seemed as if no one in the city was working, troubling, or grieving.

The two youths at the window sighed with contentment, rested the elbows of their stained sleeves on the warm sill, and forgot the furnace, the chemicals, the minerals, and all the materials of the vases, pots, and bottles in the chambers behind them.

"If I were a knight," said Hans, "I would offer myself as a champion to the Lady Anne to challenge this Romanist and rescue her from him. What would she be doing now, Walter--weeping perhaps?"

"Have you ever seen her?" asked the Burgundian.

"Never; she is kept close in the castle, poor soul."

"Well, it is a cruel thing," agreed Walter, "to exile a young girl from her home and her faith for some whim of policy no one understands."

"Nay, the reason is simple," replied Hans. "If the Lady Anne were to marry a German Prince who might put forward some claims, what of the Elector's position? whereas wedded to a great foreign noble she will give her uncle no trouble at all, at least so said Graf von Gebers to the master the other day, and he added he would not marry his daughter to a Papist to save his head, but then, as I said, the Elector is afraid--If the Lady Anne had been a man she would have had Saxony."

"But these great ones," remarked Walter, "they marry regardless of their faith."

"As to that," said Hans wisely, "all is confusion. A king will burn at the stake a subject who is of the true faith, yet take a Protestant to wife if

it suits him. Who shall explain these great ones? But it is an ill thing," added the young man earnestly, "to ask a man to die for what he believes and then to wed his Princess to one of those who are his executioners. King Philip burns the Protestants whenever the Holy Inquisition can seize them, yet our Protestant Princess is to be wed to the friend of King Philip!"

"A question of policy," said the young Burgundian vaguely. "They always say that State reasons policy."

"I say it is a cursed marriage and one which God will not bless," returned the Lutheran with some heat.

"So declares the old Landgrave Philip," remarked Walter, "but what is the use? And we may as well see the festivities, I hear they are to cost a hundred thousand thalers and a three days' tourney--"

"For the great ones where will there be a place for you or I?"

"Oh, like enough we shall get on behind the rope as well as another. It would be a gracious thing to see the Elector tilt, and the Princess will be there in her grand dress--we must go--"

"The furnace!" cried the other with a start. "If we let that out we are not like to see much of the Lady Anne's wedding."

They withdrew their heads hastily from the window and applied themselves to the furnace, which was already beginning to turn a dead colour at the outside.

While these two young men bent their perspiring faces over the fire that was to be the womb (they hoped) of the philosopher's stone, and discussed the marriage of the Elector's ward, Philip of Spain in the Escorial, Margaret of Parma and the Bishop of Arras in Brussels, the

old Landgrave of Hesse in Cassel, the Emperor in Vienna, and the King of France at the Louvre were all occupied, more or less completely, with this same marriage, for the groom was one of King Philip's most important subjects--his father's most intimate page and confidant, and also, in his own right, a person of unusual riches, power, and position, one of the first cavaliers of his age, an extremely popular noble, and a man already, in his first youth, distinguished as soldier and governor; therefore all these rulers and statesmen were so keenly considering his marriage.

The name of the bridegroom--a name obnoxious to the Lutherans of Germany as belonging to a great Papist noble--was William of Nassau, Prince of Orange.

II - FRAULEIN ANNE

When the Elector returned to the palace occupied by the Saxon Court during this stay in Leipsic, he was still engaged in considering the wisdom of this marriage of his ward.

He had striven for it during three years, and he had accomplished it in spite of King Philip, in spite of the Landgrave of Hesse, but now, on the eve of success, his heart misgave him.

True, there was no possible objection to the marriage from any worldly point of view. Anne of Saxony could not hope for any better match, and so the Elector had always argued. There remained also his strong personal reasons for getting the girl whose sex alone prevented her from filling his place--out of the country with a husband whose interests did not lie in Germany. But there was always the one fact that troubled the conscience and vexed the repose of Augustus the fact that had caused the old Landgrave Philip to withhold his consent and only bestow a very chary blessing on his granddaughter-

-she was to marry a Roman Catholic Prince, a friend of Philip, a one-time favourite of Charles; and the bridegroom's assurances that she should be allowed to practise according to the Augsburg Confession were extremely vague and unsatisfactory--indeed, he had stated that the Lutheran Princess would be expected to 'live Catholicly' when she took up her residence in the dominions of Philip of Spain.

However, it was a fine marriage, a brilliant marriage, a marriage eminently convenient to the Elector, and he endeavoured to stifle these late doubts and scruples.

As soon as he reached the palace he went in search of his niece that he might at once present her with the protective amulet, which was to preserve her from the snares and lures of Popery.

The rooms were overcrowded with people; everywhere was confusion and excitement. No one, from the scullions to the Electress, talked of anything but the wedding; preparations for receiving the guests, the coming and going of armourers, tailors, cooks, confectioners, filled the air with noise and bustle; the stewards and heralds were overwhelmed with work; loud disputes as to the arrangements for the feasts and tourneys echoed in the corridors; the pages and valets were too excited to be useful; and the women did nothing but chatter about clothes.

As the Elector made his way through the confusion and thought of the cost of his share in all this elaborate merry-making, he, too, began to be sick of this wedding, to wish it well over and his niece safely in the Netherlands.

He found the Lady Anne in the dark, lofty, antechamber of her apartments. Here the confusion of the palace had culminated, the whole room was strewn with dresses, hats, cloaks, and bales of stuff; waiting-women, serving-women, and tailors were running here and

there displaying, explaining, and arranging their wares.

Near the tall, pointed Gothic window stood a structure of polished wood the shape of a gallows, and on this elegant gibbet hung several brilliantly dressed dolls, swinging by their necks like so many gay little corpses.

They were the models showing the bride the completed splendours of some of her bridal gowns, and she stood near them, pulling them out on their strings and examining them; the strong sunlight was over her and them and lying in a pool of gold at her feet.

Anne of Saxony, the heroine of this important and long-debated marriage, whose name was now in every one's mouth, and whose approaching union to a Papist noble had roused the compassionate chivalry of others beside Vanderlinden's two apprentices, was now sixteen years of age. Being the sole child of the great Elector Maurice, she would, if a boy, have been in the place her uncle now held. Connected by her mother's side with the Hesses, she was of the finest blood in Germany, and numbered most of the great families among her kinsmen; and her early orphanage, her high rank, the glory of her father's fame, and this famous marriage project had made of her a heroine in the eyes of Lutheran Germany.

The maiden who stood turning over the dressmaker's dolls looked, however, far from a heroine of any manner of romance.

She was of medium height, and her whole body was twisted, crooked in shoulder and hip; when she walked she halted in the fashion known in her country as the devil's limp; her figure was thin, undeveloped; her face pale, her features commonplace, save for the mouth, which was abnormally wide and loose though closed with a certain firmness; her eyes were light, large, and expressive; her hair dull, between brown and flaxen, and growing in a straight ugly fashion

from her high brows.

In her whole person there was not one charm nor grace, ill-health had robbed her even of the bloom of her early youth, nor did her manners or her expression compensate for her defects; her gestures were awkward and ungraceful, her voice shrill, and her look conveyed the utmost arrogance and unbridled temper.

She was indeed both so unattractive and so unamiable, that the Elector had used her defects with the Landgrave as an argument to induce him to consent to her marriage.

"There will not be too many suitors for one crooked in mind and body," he had said, and, looking at her now as she stood eagerly snatching at the swinging dolls, his scruples and regrets at having found her a Papist husband banished in satisfaction at having found her any husband at all.

"Gracious uncle," said Anne, giving him a quick glance, "I am very much occupied."

Augustus took no notice of this rebuke, he was used to her curtness. She considered herself his superior, and her haughtiness, her tempers, and her unreasonableness had often caused the Electress to beseech her husband to hasten, at any cost, the marriage which would relieve them of her.

"I have brought you the jewel which Vanderlinden made for you," he said, and held out the little box-wood case.

Anne turned from the dolls and came forward with some interest. She wore a long gown of tawny coloured cloth, and a white lawn wimple; the heaviness of her attire added to her years but hardly disguised her deformity.

She took the jewel-case with hands that trembled a little, her lips were dry, her eyes bright, in her cheeks an unusual flush showed; excitement burnt her like a fever, her whole poor distorted body was quivering.

The Elector saw this, and a strange sort of pity for his brother's only child touched him; after all she was but a girl, and this was three days before her wedding.

"Dear niece," he said, putting his great hand gently on her crooked shoulder, "may that amulet preserve your faith pure in the strange land and keep you safe in body and spirit."

Anne laughed affectedly and gazed critically at the jewel in her palm.

"It is not very beautiful," she remarked.

"It is very potent, and I hope you will always wear it," replied her uncle anxiously. "And every time you look at it, remember you were born and bred in the Reformed Faith."

"As to that," said Anne, "His Highness himself said I was to read Amadis de Gaul and play the lute and enjoy such diversions as were fitted to one of my station, and not trouble my head about matters of religion."

Anne had often quoted this remark of her future husband, and the Elector frowned to hear it again on her lips.

"The Prince spoke as a man to a child," he returned, "but you are no longer a child and cannot reason as one. His Highness has promised to respect your faith, and you must respect it also in heart and in spirit, Anne."

The girl carelessly placed the amulet round her neck.

"Oh, I shall do very well, dear uncle," she replied. "I am quite content to trust to His Highness."

"But it is you yourself who must keep the faith alive within you when in the midst of idolaters," said the Lutheran Prince sternly.

"You speak like Grandfather Hesse!" cried the girl peevishly. "I believe you regret my marriage already, but, as I wrote His Highness, God wills it, and the Devil shall not hinder it!"

His frown deepened and a flush of anger mounted to his cheek.

"I shall regret it if you behave like a wilful child, dear niece."

"I have put on your amulet," returned Anne ungraciously. "What else would you? And my serving-women wait--"

"I shall not keep you from them," interrupted the Elector, "but remember that there are more serious matters than gowns and chains appertaining to this marriage."

With that he turned away, for he saw that to argue further with the bride was useless, since her natural pride and vanity had been augmented past reason by the excitement and importance of her present position.

Anne was, indeed, almost beside herself. For three years she had been bent on this marriage with all the passion of which she was capable. She wanted her freedom, she wanted increased grandeur, she wanted the enjoyments of the gay court of Brussels--of which she had heard so much--and she believed herself violently enamoured of the gorgeous cavalier whom she had seen once on the occasion of his visit to Dresden and who was to be her husband.

She watched with pleasure the departure of her uncle, and impatiently called the tailor who was responsible for the dolls. She had some fault to find with each of them: one model had the skirt too long, in another the colour was hideous, the gold lacing of a third did not please her. These objections were taken at random, for she was far too overwrought to consider or even notice the details of the beautiful little dresses.

When the man had bowed himself out with his small gallows full of puppets, Anne sank into one of the deep chairs of blue-and-yellow velvet; her back ached from standing, her head throbbed, her heavy gown dragged at her shoulders, she had not slept for several nights and her whole feeble body was fatigued, but she would spare neither herself nor those who had to please her humour.

Gowns, petticoats, mantles, caps, hoods, gloves, shoes, jewels, every ornament or trinket luxury could devise was brought before her for her inspection. She had been most extravagant in her purchases, and it was already said that when her debts and the feasts had been paid, there would not be anything left of the hundred thousand thalers that formed her dowry. Her thin, feverish fingers handled the brocades and velvets, the silks and lawns, the girdles and chains with a kind of eager energy, as if these things were so many weapons she was piling up against fate.

And so unconsciously she regarded them, she meant to be the grandest lady at the Court of the Regent; her whole small soul was centred on this childish ambition and had no room for any other emotion save a fierce, jealous, but inchoate desire that her brilliant husband should love her. She thought all this bravery would help her accomplish both ends, and therefore devoted all her passionate interest to these splendours of silvered silk, Venetian velvet, cloaks of miniver and red fox, skirts of many coloured brocade, doe-skin fringed gloves and shoes sewn with gold thread.

At last her weakness could endure no more; with an hysteric petulance that bordered on tears she dismissed every one, and, taking the arm of her favourite waiting-woman, she limped through the bowing ranks of tailors, jewellers, and sewing-maids into her inner and private chamber.

There she dropped into the cushion-piled chair near the window that stood open on the sunshine, and so sat, looking huddled and dwarfish, her right hand, sparkling with the hard brilliance of an emerald ring, supporting her aching head, her feet resting on a great footstool, her knees drawn up.

The waiting-woman stood at the end of the huge crimson-curtained bed, waiting the pleasure of her mistress.

She was a tall girl, subdued, quiet, patient--qualities to which she owed the dangerous favour of capricious Anne's preference. Her father had served under the Elector Maurice, but returning to his native city, Ghent in the Netherlands, he had been executed as a heretic under the rule of the late Regent, and his entire property confiscated. His wife had fled with her child to the Saxon Court, where she had soon after died of her miseries, leaving her daughter under the protection of the Electress.

Such was the short, sad experience of Rénée le Meung, which had left her reliant, reserved, self-effacing, humble, but passionately attached to the faith for which her parents and her happiness had been sacrificed, and of an earnest gravity beyond her years.

She endured the whims and caprices, the tempers and tyrannies of Anne with more than the usual submission of the dependant, and her lack of vanity and her indifference made her a foil that was precious to the arrogance of her mistress.

Rénée was beautiful with the opulent beauty of her country, but she ignored it, and she had no lover, so Anne was content to ignore it too. Besides, her own vanity was too great for her to be aware how her own unattractiveness was heightened by the loveliness of the graceful Fleming, with her crimson-brown hair and eyes, her rose complexion, her white skin, and exact features, though she was so plain in her dress, so grave in her manner, so always and completely in the background that many besides her mistress might have discounted this beauty that lacked all flash and allure.

As she stood now, outwardly patiently at attention, her thoughts were far away, returning, as always, to the dear past when she had had a home and those who loved her, the times when she had heard her father laugh, her mother sing, when she had herself been full of life and hope and all pleasantness; her present situation, that of an exile employed by charity, she forgot she seemed for a moment free, as she had once been behind the loved walls of Ghent--

"Rénée," said Anne, opening her eyes, "the Prince wrote to know what my colours were. When he enters Leipsic he will have a thousand knights and gentlemen with him is it not magnificent?"

The waiting-woman closed her thoughts.

"Indeed, Your Grace is very fortunate," she answered quietly, taking up her wearisome part of confidante. She endured Anne's futile vanities not so much from good humour as from sheer indifference; her disinterest in her present life was her surest buckler against what she had to endure.

"He is indeed a very splendid cavalier," said Anne, with vast satisfaction, "and he made me such fine speeches and compliments. I wish you had seen him when he came to Dresden, but you will soon see him now. And I am higher born than he, for he is

only a Count in Germany. Yet he is a sovereign Prince too, and I shall give way to no one at the Court of Brussels. Is it not all very pleasant?"

So the girl chattered on in her shrill, high voice, and the waiting-woman dutifully assented to all she said; but Rénée's calm, Rénée's self-effacement, usually so grateful to Anne, to-day offended her. She wanted a more human interest shown in her affairs, some excitement, some envy, some jealousy.

"You talk as if you were sick!" she cried fretfully. "Do you not care at all about my wedding?"

Rénée flushed at the rare personal address; it was seldom Anne spoke to her as to another human being.

"Of course I care," she answered gravely, "but how can I comment on matters so much above me?"

Anne Was mollified.

"Would you not like a husband, rich and handsome?" she asked, trying to provoke the flattery of the other's envy.

"I?" asked Rénée, in genuine surprise. "Who will ever marry me?"

Anne smiled.

"Perhaps some day I shall find some one for you. How old are you?"

"Twenty-five, Your Grace."

"That is not very young! Nearly ten years older than I am! Is it not very fine to be married at sixteen? Would you not like to be married soon?"

"I would never marry any but a Lutheran," replied Rénée calmly.

Anne flushed, and her bright eyes flashed with amazing fury.

"Ah! You, too, dare to blame me because the Prince is a Papist!" she exclaimed.

"Nay," said Rénée gently. "I know there are reasons of State."

"Reasons of State?" shrieked Anne. "I love him and he loves me! You are jealous because you will never have such a knight!"

"Never, truly," replied the waiting-woman with undiminished sweetness. "It is only great ladies like Your Grace who can wed with such as the Prince of Orange."

"You would not marry save with a Lutheran," said Anne. "Then you would not marry the Prince?"

"That is a jest--to suppose such a thing."

"Ay, but would you?" insisted Anne.

Rénée's native courage and honesty flashed through her long reserve, her self-effacement.

"I would not wed with a Papist were he the Emperor himself," she replied firmly.

"You proud hard creature!" cried Anne, vexed to tears. "But it is all a lie--a jealous lie, you would wed the first Papist who asked you."

Rénée was silent.

"Wait until you see the Prince," insisted Anne childishly. "There is no

one like him--no one."

"So I have always heard," said Rénée sincerely.

"Did you ever see his first wife?" asked Anne abruptly. "Was she pretty? Did he care for her?"

"I never saw the first Princess, Your Grace. They were very young when they married, and she died very soon."

"Well, I am sure he has forgotten her. If you are so afraid of the Papists and hate them so, why do you come with me to Brussels?" she added maliciously.

The bitter truth, "I must go where I can earn my bread," rose to Rénée's lips, but she suppressed it and merely replied, "I am not afraid of any one corrupting my faith, Your Grace, and I shall be with a Protestant mistress."

"I suppose you would rather stay here," said Anne, "if you could find some Lutheran to marry, but you are not very young and you have red hair, therefore you must make the best of it and come to Brussels."

Rénée was absolutely unmoved by her mistress's rudeness; she hardly heard the words.

"Have you any relations in Brussels?" asked Anne.

"No," replied the waiting-woman, "nor any in the Netherlands. I think--we are all scattered--wandering, or still for ever in the grave;" then quickly changing a subject on which she had been betrayed into speaking with feeling, she asked, "Has His Grace's alchemist's experiment succeeded? It was to be known whether or no this week."

"The Elector said nothing to me of it," replied Anne fretfully. "He gave me a silly little jewel Vanderlinden made. Of course the experiment has failed."

"Poor alchemist!" said Rénée. A vast pity for all endeavour, all disappointment, was now her strongest feeling; the grief of others had more power to move her than her own distress.

Anne began to moan that her head was aching beyond bearing; she indeed looked ill. There was something tragic in her frailty and her excitement, her deformity and her vanity.

Rénée went to fetch the sweet wine and comfits for which she called and which were her usual medicine; as always, she drank greedily and soon fell heavily asleep.

The waiting-woman put back the engraved silver plate and tankard on the black sideboard, and crept softly to the window where the August sun might fall on her face.

She turned her full gentle eyes with a great pity on the wretched little figure of her mistress, whose thin hands were nervously twitching, even in her sleep.

What could this marriage promise?--the groom one of King Philip's courtiers, worldly, handsome, able; the bride this miserable, fretful, ignorant child, mad with vanity, sick with excitement, diseased in body, unbalanced in mind. Rénée, who knew Anne as few did, was almost sorry for the Papist Prince who could not know her at all.

"And for such a union they rejoice and dance and hold their jousts!" thought the waiting-woman wearily.

She gazed out into the sunny air, it was near late afternoon and very peaceful.

Rénée did not see the towers of Leipsic; her mind spread the world before her like a great map painted with bright pictures--great tyrants slaughtering, burning, oppressing; poor people flying homeless, dying unnoticed--everywhere wrong, violence, cruelty--and no one to rise against it, no one to defy such a man as King Philip.

Every one was for himself, his private gain; even the Protestant Princes of Germany who had stood for the faith of Martin Luther, they put their own convenience first, as in this marriage which the Elector had urged forward for his personal interest. There was a Protestant monarch on the throne of England, but she remained friendly with Catholic potentates and raised no finger to help those of her faith so horribly persecuted.

"Always policy, ambition, self-seeking," thought Rénée wearily. "Is there not *one* in all the world would stand for his God, his country only? Not *one* to be the champion of liberty of faith?"

Not one, she believed; they kept the gaudy show of chivalry in the tourneys and jousts, but the spirit of it was long since lost. There were no more knights, there was no one to stand forward for the weak and the miserable, the humble and the helpless; the Reformed Faith had produced saints and martyrs but not yet a champion or a protector.

"They all bow to circumstance, these great princes and nobles," thought Rénée; "there is not one of them who would endanger the tenth part of his possessions for the cause of the poor Protestants, for liberty, for country--not one."

She leant her sick head against the mullions and closed her eyes; life seemed so long, so futile, the world so wrong, so ugly.

"There *have* been heroes," the eternal romance of youth whispered in her heart. "Why should not one come now when he is so needed, ah, so sorely needed?"

She opened her eyes on the sun, on the hot, silent city with the languorous air of festival and holiday.

"If I ever met such an one, or knew of him, how I would worship him!"

Love she never thought of; she did not believe that it was possible for her to ever love, but she knew that she would gladly die for one who would champion her persecuted faith, her oppressed country--very gladly die, or live, in happy abnegation in his service.

The clock struck six; the tire-women entered to rouse Anne and dress her for supper; it was Rénée's one time of freedom. She hastened away before her mistress's peevish caprice should have decided to detain her, and went forth into the clean, bright streets.

III - LOUIS OF NASSAU

Leipsic was unfamiliar to Rénée le Meung, she did not know where the sunny streets she chose would lead her, but as she knew no one and had no object in her walk, this did not trouble her. She walked slowly, enjoying the sun, which was the only thing left her to enjoy.

She did not seem a lady of the court, so simple and even poor was her dark green kirtle and mantle, so unpretentious her whole appearance; even if she had wished to follow some degree of fashion she was unable to, for her sole resource was what was given her as waiting-woman to the Elector's niece, and that was little enough.

But she was utterly unconscious of her plainness of attire as she

walked unnoticed by the hurrying crowd that now and then pushed her against the wall or the street posts in their haste.

Every one was full of the wedding and the subsequent festivities; the name of Anne and of her groom was on every lip; there seemed no room in Leipsic for anything but rejoicing. The air of gaiety, of idleness, and holiday was accentuated by the great glory of the late afternoon sun which filled the air with golden motes, blazed in golden flame in the casement windows, gleamed on the weathercocks, and filled the upper boughs of the elms and chestnuts in the squares and gardens.

As Rénée was turning into one of these squares she met the Elector's alchemist walking thoughtfully under the shade of the trees with a small brass-covered book in his hand.

She would have passed and left him to his meditations, but he chanced to see her and instantly paused and saluted her. He had a kindness for her; she had always been gentle and interested in his work when they had chanced to meet.

"This may remind you," he said, holding out the little volume, "of that wonderful Book given by a Jew to the great Nicolas Flamel by which he finally discovered the secret of secrets. Does he not describe it as with brass covers, leaves of bark engraved with an iron pencil, and symbolic pictures finely coloured?"

"And he discovered the stone?" asked Rénée.

"Ay," answered Vanderlinden wistfully, "and in evidence of it may be seen his statue to this day in Paris, together with fourteen churches and seven hospitals that he founded with the gold he manufactured."

"And the secret died with him?"

"He disclosed it to no one," admitted the alchemist. "I bought this book in memory of his--it cost but two florins and I doubt it is worth more."

He put the book under his arm and asked Rénée if she would see his house, which was but a few yards away; he had taken, he said, for his stay in Leipsic, the dwelling of another alchemist philosopher who had lately gone travelling; this man had had a shop for perfumery, soaps, and engraved gems which he--Vanderlinden--was continuing to hold open, and where he did some little trade among those gathered in Leipsic for the wedding.

"I would rather have stayed in Dresden," he added, "and concluded my experiment there, but His Princely Grace insisting on my coming hither, though not paying my expenses of the road, so I am obliged to make what I can with these washes and unguents."

"I am sorry the experiment failed," said Rénée gently. The occupation of the alchemist seemed to her more worthy than that of most other men; at least he had set his aim high, and was searching for what would benefit mankind as much as it would himself.

"Perhaps the next may succeed," answered the alchemist diffidently, "but I doubt if God hath reserved this great honour for me--this high favour."

They turned towards the house, which was situated at the corner of the square, and entered the shop--a room which was opposite the parlour where Vanderlinden had received the Elector.

This room faced west, and the full light of the setting sun poured through the broad low window on to the shelves where stood the pots, bottles, cases, boxes, vases containing the alchemist's wares, and on to the long smooth counter where the glittering scales

gleamed, and where two men were leaning over a tray of engraved gems such as are used for signet rings.

He behind the counter was the alchemist's foremost assistant, the companion of all his wanderings, and the sharer of his fortunes--a lean, silent Frenchman, named Duprès, who was a noted spirit raiser, and possessed a mother-of-pearl table on which he could bring the angels to discourse with him, and a tablet of polished jet in which he could foresee future events.

He was now engaged in holding a violet stone, clear and pure as crystal and engraved with the first labour of Hercules, against the strong sunlight, which flashed through it, giving a glorious strength of colour to the little square gem.

The customer was a young cavalier, not much over twenty, splendidly vested in black velvet cross cut over stiff white satin; a cloak of orange cloth hung from one shoulder, fastened across the breast with cords of gold, three ruffs encircled his throat, the topmost or master ruff being edged with silver lace and touching his ears.

His appearance was singularly charming; though rather below the average height, he was extremely graceful, and he carried his small, well-shaped head with the noble carriage of a fine stag; his features were aristocratic and aquiline, and expressed gaiety, frankness, and good humour; his thick, dark-brown hair fell in waves on to his ruff, and was curled low on to the brow.

His well-formed right hand lay open on the counter, palm upwards, and was filled with the sparkle and light of yellow and red stones.

Rénée knew this young seigneur well; he was Louis of Nassau, the brother and envoy of Anne's bridegroom, whose mouthpiece and proxy he had been during the three years of the negotiations.

The waiting-woman, with her instinct and training of self-effacement, was drawing back at sight of the young Count, but with his usual gay friendliness he rose and addressed her, asking her opinion of the jewels before him.

"I am a poor judge of such things," smiled Rénée. "I do not know why I am here at all, save that I was asked very courteously."

She came and stood by the counter, looking, with her habitual utter indifference, at Louis of Nassau; she did not know much of him nor had they ever spoken together further than a few words, but she did not like him despite his courtesy, his charm, his undeniable attraction.

And this dislike was because he, a Protestant himself, had been eagerly forwarding the marriage of his Papist brother with Protestant Anne, because he was known to be looking for a wealthy bride himself, and because she judged him frivolous, extravagant, and thoughtless.

"Will you be glad, seigneur," she asked with a flicker of curiosity, "when His Highness, your brother's wedding is really accomplished?"

He raised his fresh young face quickly.

"If I shall be glad?" he said, and for the first time Rénée noticed the lines of fatigue and anxiety beneath the brilliant eyes and on the fair brow.

"We shall all be glad," said Duprès, with the freedom he always assumed, "when the little lady is safely in the Netherlands."

"Not I," said Rénée. "I would rather live in Saxony than Brussels."

"Does the Lady Anne hold that opinion?" asked the Count.

The question at first amazed Rénée, then she swiftly recalled how Anne had been shut away and guarded by the Elector (her sickly unattractiveness being more hedged about than beauty, for fear reports of her should reach and disgust her prospective husband), and that Louis could only have obtained rare glimpses of her, and never have had an opportunity to know her temper nor her mind as the waiting-woman knew both.

"My mistress is very glad to go to Brussels, and very devoted to His Highness," she answered conventionally, adding, with more feeling, "She is very young, princely Count, and frail, and the excitement of these days exalts her spirit."

"She does not regret Saxony, I think," remarked the alchemist, "which is well for the future tranquillity of His Highness."

"Nor is she afraid of a Papist Court, eh?" asked the young Count with a frank laugh. "I believe the maiden thinks more of her gowns and her new titles than of the sermons and prayer books she leaves behind."

He spoke carelessly, slipping a ring with a dark honey coloured stone on his finger the while. Rénée wondered at him.

"Her Grace will remain of the Reformed Faith," she said.

"But she will live Catholicly," quoted the Count with a smile. He spoke as if he was pleased (as indeed he was) that the laborious negotiations had ended in the Prince getting what he had been striving for from the first, namely, the lady without any conditions as to her faith, for a Protestant wife was obviously impossible for a noble of King Philip. Rénée had watched the troubled course of the tangled

diplomacies of guardian and suitor with equal disdain for the Elector who gave his niece to a Papist for his own convenience and the Prince who took a bride, who was to him a heretic, merely because it suited his ambitions.

Louis of Nassau noticed her silence; he had remarked before that she was strangely quiet and also that she was exceedingly comely. His glance, quick to appreciate and admire fair women, now fell kindly over her graceful figure, her face so finely coloured and so delicate in line, the rose carnation of lip and cheek, the glow of the heavy, carelessly dressed hair.

"I wonder what you think of?" he said.

Rénée started at the personal address, she had been so long a mere part of the background that when one treated her as an individual it always confused her.

"What should I think of, princely Count?" she answered. "Foolish things, of course."

Louis handed the ring and the violet gem to Duprès, who packed them into little cases of cedar wood.

"You do not look as if your thoughts were foolish," he replied, with more gravity than she had ever associated with him.

"Nay, I think she is a very wise lady, noble seigneur," said the alchemist.

"Your thoughts, then?" smiled Louis of Nassau.

Rénée's deep-set indifference to all things overcame her momentary confusion.

"I am too good a Protestant to rejoice at this marriage," she replied quietly, "and my thoughts were all sad ones, noble Count, and did not in any way touch your high policies."

Louis of Nassau answered gently; he knew something of her history.

"It is all a question of policy certainly," he paid her the compliment of sincere speaking. "The marriage suits the Elector and my brother--the lady too, I think--and religious differences are easily accommodated among people of sense. The Prince is no fanatic--your faith will be protected as long as you are in his household. He, too, was bred a Protestant."

Rénée could make no answer; she knew the Prince had left his faith when the splendid heritages, rank, and honours of his cousin Renée of Orange had fallen to him--his father had sent the German Protestant to the Emperor's Court to become a Papist, and almost a Spaniard. Renée saw nothing splendid in any of this--it was a piece with the rest of the world.

"You dislike my brother?" asked Louis shrewdly.

"I like no one," said the waiting-woman calmly.

"Have you seen the Prince?"

"Nay; when His Highness came to Dresden I was very ill."

"I thought that you had not seen him," remarked Louis. "No one who has seen him dislikes him."

"You put me in the wrong," protested Renée. "Who am I to judge great ones? Take no heed of me, gracious Count. I am looking for a hero, and that is as hard to find as the holy stone," she added, with a smile at the alchemist.

"You have been reading Amadis de Gaul, or Charlemagne and his paladins--fie, I did not think it of your gravity," jested Louis of Nassau.

Rénée flushed into animation, and it was like the sudden blooming of a tightly closed flower, so did the quick flash of her feeling light her features into beauty.

"There *were* such men," she said, "and might be again, surely--do you not believe so, Magister? And never were they more needed than now--"

She checked herself sharply and the lovely flush faded. She turned away and picked up one of the slender glass bottles of essences Vanderlinden had placed before her.

Louis of Nassau looked at her curiously. "She is beautiful," he thought.

"Perhaps one day you will find your hero and Vanderlinden his stone," he said, and the sun flickered like a caress over his brilliant person and his pleasant young face.

"Perhaps? Nay, surely," replied the alchemist. "Or if we do not, another will. For both are there as surely as God is in heaven."

"You, too, think the world needs some knight, some paladin?" asked the Count, drawing on his white gloves stitched with gold.

"I have travelled much," replied the alchemist, "and could not avoid seeing, albeit that I was ever engaged in abstruse studies, the great horrid cruelties and wrongs abroad, especially under the reign of His Majesty King Philip, in whose dominions God grant me never to set foot again. I was in England, princely seigneur, while he was King of that country, and I did see things that made me weary of life. So, too,

in Spain from whence I fled hastily. And, lately, it is no better in the Netherlands; indeed there are few places where a man can think as he please and speak freely, save only in these states of Germany."

Louis of Nassau looked thoughtfully at the speaker, and then at Rénée whose fair head was bent over the rows of alabaster pots and bottles of twisted glass and crystal. He had never lived under a tyrant, his brief joyous life had passed in absolute freedom, and with him his faith was not the result of conviction but of heritage. Still the old man's words and the girl's eloquent face were not without effect on him; some emotion strange and vague echoed in his heart, and he sighed as he took the two little boxes from Duprès.

"There are many changes abroad," he said. "Who knows but that this hero may appear to put straight all these tangled wrongs."

He took up his high-crowned white hat with the cluster of black plumes, and, saluting all very pleasantly, left the shop.

"There goes no hero there at least," said Duprès softly, glancing through the window at the Count, who glittered in the sun without. "He spent fifty thalers to-day in unguents--conserve of violets, lotion of citrons, sweetmeats of pistachio nut, rose and orange water!"

"Is his brother like him?" asked Rénée.

"I have never seen the Prince of Orange," answered the alchemist, but Duprès, who appeared to have been everywhere and seen every one, declared he knew the Prince well by sight.

"He is more magnificent than Count Louis, and more to be feared though so few years older--for he is certainly a great Prince. But prodigal and greatly in debt, they say--and not very pious, nor straight-living--at least, no more so than any man of his blood and

youth."

"Ah, Dominus," said Rénée, "cannot you look in your jet tablets and see what the future of this marriage will be?"

"I have looked for the Elector time enough," replied Duprès with a little smile, "and saw nothing but confusion."

"Have you tried to see the future of the poor Protestant peoples?" asked Rénée earnestly.

The Frenchman carefully put away the tray of gems.

"That is too large a thing to be looked for in a square of jet or any magic mirror whatever," he replied.

"We must look for it in our own hearts," said Rénée sadly. "Well, I have out-stayed my leisure; give me leave to come another time and see your treasures."

Vanderlinden took up a tall bottle of milk-white glass with a stopper of scarlet porcelain and filled with jasmine essence; he offered it to Rénée with a half-awkward kindness.

The waiting-woman, who never received any kind of gift, felt the tears swiftly sting her lids.

"I shall not come to see you since you treat me so well," she said, with an eager little smile; she did not realize that she was the only lady who had ever come to the shop without a cavalier to buy gifts for her, nor that if she had been as other women Count Louis would have offered her as much perfumery as she could need; she was unaware how her reserve and her indifference hedged her from common courtesies. She did not miss gallantry and compliments, but she often missed kindness, and therefore the alchemist's action

stirred her heart, while Count Louis's flattery would have left her cold.

She passed out into the street, the aromatic odours of the shop still about her. She saw Vanderlinden's two apprentices hurrying along with rosettes of Anne's colours threaded with orange ribbons. The streets were now in shadow, for the sun had set behind the houses, but over all was that sense of festival, of excitement, and in the air were the names of Anne and William of Orange.

IV - The Saint Bartholomew Wedding

Anne of Saxony stood at the top of the wide stairs of Leipsic town hall waiting to welcome her bridegroom; about her spread the motionless pageantry of harquebusiers, burgher guard, nobles, gentlemen, and pages--all ranged up the stairs and on the landings in groups of brilliant colours and shining weapons.

It was St. Bartholomew's Day, the 24th of August, and intensely hot; the air of the town hall, though constantly refreshed with perfume sprays, was close and dry; through the windows, carefully shuttered against the heat, the sun crept in through odd chinks and made spots of dazzling gold. The pages sighed under their breath, the gentlemen heaved their shoulders under the heavy weight of velvet, brocade, and jewelled chains; the ladies behind the bride swayed to and fro with little whispers and glances among themselves; the Electress stood slightly apart, covertly fanning herself, and lamenting to the bride's uncle, the Landgrave William, son of the old Landgrave of Hesse, that the electoral palace which was so much more commodious than the town hall, should be under repair.

The bride herself stood in advance of all, on the very edge of the top stair; her eyes were directed fiercely down between 'the two rows of soldiers that glittered against the dark wood balustrades.

The long weeks of tumultuous days and sleepless nights had reduced her feebleness to utter exhaustion, but passionate excitement supported her, and gave her the strength to stand there bearing the weight of her heavy robes, the heated air, the fatigue of standing.

The Elector, with four thousand nobles, gentlemen, and soldiers, had ridden to meet the bridegroom and his escort outside the city; to those waiting here the return of Augustus and his guest seemed wearisomely delayed.

"Why do they not come--why do they not come?" muttered Anne again and again.

Rénée le Meung, who stood close behind, remarked her mistress's gorgeous figure with a tired curiosity.

The waiting-woman was herself so remote in heart from all this festivity which she stood in the centre of, so far in spirit from all the excitement by which she was surrounded, that these people seemed to her in a strange way lifeless--splendid puppets like those the tailor had brought on the polished wood gallows; and when she looked at the bride she was sorry, in a vague way, that Anne was not more lovely, more gracious, more sweet. The long-stifled romance of her own youth told her the central figure of all this pageantry should be more worthy.

Since seven that morning Anne had stood on her feet being attired, and it was now towards two of the clock--the actual time of the wedding being five.

All those hours of her women's labour and fatigue, her own screaming impatience and trembling nervousness, had resulted in an appearance almost grotesquely brilliant.

She wore a gown of stiff satin, interchangeable wine red and yellow--the colour of old amber; it flowed fold on fold from her tight waist, to fall heavily on the floor, weighted by a hem of ruby and topaz embroidery; in front it was slightly caught up by a gold cord, to display a petticoat of black and crimson brocade in a design of flowers, and the pointed shoes cloth of gold with red silk tissue roses.

The bodice was crimson cloth of gold, cut low in the front, and rising behind to a high upstanding collar of finest gold lace, the full sleeves were of pale yellow satin, laced across and across with gold and crimson cords; round the throat and over the bosom hung strings of pearls and rubies and long chains of curious enamel; the dull-coloured hair was crowned by a gold cap sewn with pearls, and long emeralds swung in the ears.

From Anne's stooping shoulders there hung, despite the heat, an orange mantle lined and bordered with ermine, which lay a full yard on the polished boards behind her. But none of this costly and princely magnificence could disguise the thin malformed figure, and the fierce fire of the gems only served to make the pale weary face look like a colourless mask--and colourless she was, from her pallid lips to her light brows--only in her pale eyes burned the flame of her passionate, jealous, eager soul.

So she stood, waiting for her lover, as she was pleased to consider him; and Rénée was sorry for her mistress from her heart.

And now the doors at the foot of the stairs were opened, and the full August sun fell on the black and orange of the halberdiers, the spearmen, and harquebusiers, the gleaming weapons and fluttering banners that rose above the heads of the crowd that filled the market square.

Outside the town hall the whole splendid cavalcade had halted, and presently, through the broad shaft of sunshine and in at the doors came the Elector, accompanied by several other German princes and the bridegroom, escorted by his three brothers--the Counts John, Adolphus, and Louis.

At the foot of the stairs these gentlemen paused for a second, and among those waiting at the top there was the slightest movement and murmur--a bending forward of expectant faces, the rustle of stiff satins.

There was indeed great curiosity to behold the bridegroom, many of those present having never seen him before; Rénée, more curious because more thoughtful than the others, stepped lightly from behind her mistress and gazed down the stairs.

She saw one cavalier come forward from the others and ascend the stairs a little in advance of them; this was he whose fame had travelled so far, who had been so criticized, so discussed in Saxony, whose marriage project had been the subject of so many intrigues and broils in Madrid, Brussels, and Dresden.

Slowly he came up the stairs, his eyes fixed on Anne, and himself the subject of all regards.

Rénée watched him long, intently.

This was her first sight of him, and she was long to remember this brilliant scene, long to recall in other scenes of terror, misery, and exaltation that figure coming up the stairs with the blaze of sunshine and the little group of princes behind him.

This, her first impression of William of Orange, was of a gentleman of extreme good looks with the carriage of a soldier and the grace of

a courtier. He was slender, twenty-eight years of age, and of a Southern type--dark, warmly coloured, with a small head and regular features, the nose straight, the lips full, the eyes chestnut brown, large, and well-opened; his red-brown hair was short, thick, and curling, his beard close shaven, his complexion dark. He wore still a simple dress of tawny velvet buttoned high under the chin and, turning over with a little collar of embroidered lawn, it was slashed over an undervest of scarlet, and the sleeves and breeches were of black silk fretted with silver work; his one adornment was a long gold chain of massive links, passed six times round his neck; he carried his gloves and a black cap with a heron's plume in his left hand.

Straight up the stairs he came with an ease that seemed unconscious. Anne swayed towards him; he kissed her cold hand, smiled at her, and stood so a moment beside her, looking down into her pale, almost frightened, face.

In that moment Rénée saw, as by a sudden light, the bride as she was in contrast with him. By the standard of his complete manhood, his finished accomplishment, his undeniable charm, gaiety, and power, she beheld Anne a peevish, sickly, malicious, ignorant child, and she turned her eyes away. This contrast of bride and groom seemed to her to touch this mating with horror.

The Prince now turned to the Electress, and Anne, with a deep reverence to her future husband, withdrew with her women to the apartments prepared for her use.

No sooner was she there than her strained control gave way; she scolded, she stamped, and finally broke into hysterical tears.

The frightened agitated women ran hither and thither with cordials and essences and all the details of the resplendent wedding-gown with which their mistress had to be vested.

Rénée, a little bewildered by that sight of the Prince of Orange, went about her duties quietly; she believed she knew the cause of Anne's untimely tears. Deep beneath the Princess's vanities, ignorances, and arrogances lay a woman's intuitions; these warned her, sometimes in a manner not to be ignored, that she was crooked, undesirable, and now they told her that the Prince's kind glance had not been that of a lover. Anne, too, Renée thought, had felt the bitter difference between herself and her betrothed.

At last the bride, alternately shaken by nervous temper and stormy sobbing, was arrayed in the wedding-gown of milk-white velvet, overveiled with a skirt of braided pearls, transparent silver wings rising at the back in lieu of a ruff, and over all a train of pale purple embroidered with crystal flowers; a wreath of myrtle twisted with an orange ribbon was placed on the stiff waves of her crimped hair, the traces of tears were powdered away as well as might be, the rings, necklets, bracelets, chains were replaced. She was perfumed with costly essence extracted from Eastern lilies, then escorted to an upper chamber where waited the Elector, the Electress, two town councillors, the Prince of Orange, and his brother Counts.

All the women now withdrew save the Electress's lady, Sophia von Miltitz, and Renée.

In a corner, before a table, stood one Wolf Sesdel, a notary.

The Prince of Orange had changed his attire; he was in rose cloth of gold from head to foot, with a short cloak of dark violet velvet lined with blue, and a triple ruff of gold tissue.

Rénée glanced at him again. "A mere courtier, like his brother," she thought. Her eyes turned to Count John; he, too, was a princely young man, though without the great charm of William or the infinite grace of Louis.

Bride and groom were now placed opposite each other before the notary, his brother and one of his gentlemen behind the Prince; Dame Sophia, one of the councillors, and Rénée, behind Anne; in front Elector and Electress with Hans von Ponika, the second councillor, who addressed the Prince, reminding him that the Elector had sent him a memorandum requiring him to preserve Anne in her present faith, to allow her to receive the Augsburg sacraments, even, at extreme need, in her chamber, and to instruct her children in the doctrines of the Reformed Church.

This memorandum William had always refused to sign. He listened to the councillor's long speech courteously, but with a look of amusement, Rénée thought, as if he appreciated at its true value this last attempt on the part of Augustus to salve his conscience on the question of the bridegroom's Papistry.

"As your princely Highness," continued Von Ponika, "has been pleased to so far give no agreement in writing on these points, it has been arranged that you should now give your consent verbally, before these princely witnesses."

William, with laughing eyes in a grave face, looked at the Elector, whose stern features were impassive. Anne was trembling like one in a fever, and continually pressing her handkerchief to her dry lips and burning cheeks.

Von Ponika proceeded to read the memorandum which William had rejected since April last, and asked if His Highness was prepared to keep the articles contained therein?

The Prince advanced a step towards the Elector and answered Rénée noted his voice, low, deep, and soft, a very masculine voice--

"Gracious Elector, I remember the writing that you sent me in April, and which this learned doctor has just read. I now declare to Your Highness that I will act in all as becomes a Prince, and conform to this note as I ever said I would conform."

This evasion was all the Elector had hoped for. He knew as well as William did that no subject of King Philip could live according to the Augsburg Confession nor practise the rites of the Reformed Church, but he had finally satisfied his conscience, and when William offered his hand the Elector took it heartily.

The notary then put the Prince's reply on record, and all left the room.

The bridal procession was now formed. In front the Court musicians playing bravely, after them the marshals, the nobles, the guests, the envoys, the Elector and his wife, and the bride and groom, followed by the councillors and such of the Netherland grandees who had dared King Philip sufficiently to attend a wedding His Majesty secretly frowned on.

So to the sound of drums and trumpet they entered the great hall, which was hung from ceiling to floor with fine silk tapestries of Arras and carpeted with Eastern rugs, and furnished with five round tables and chairs, each chair like a throne.

There the marriage ceremony took place. If the Elector had tacitly accepted William's evasions on religious questions, William as tacitly accepted the Lutheran marriage rites, which would have been little to the taste of King Philip.

After Doctor Pfeffinger had united the two, Anne was conducted to a gold couch with gold curtains set on a dais at the upper end of the hall; the Prince seated himself beside her, and kneeling pages of noble blood handed them goblets of rock crystal filled with sweet

wine, and comfits on plates of engraved silver.

The rest of the company were also served, and all drank standing and looking towards the bride. Anne's spirits had now risen; she was flushed with pride and happiness, her eyes sparkled, and she drank her wine with a relish.

The Prince had rather an absent look, though completely at his ease; his mind did not appear to be wholly in the ceremonies in which he was taking part so gracefully.

He now rose, and the Margrave of Brandenburg raised Anne and presented her to her husband.

"Gracious Highness," he said, "I give you this maiden on behalf of the Elector, and I recommend Your Grace to cherish her with all care and affection, and to leave her undisturbed in the right use of the Holy Gospel and Sacraments."

The bridal couple parted, to a second time change their garments.

Anne was in a rapture.

"Is he not noble and fine?" she asked her weary women as they again disrobed her. "I think there is no knight like him in Europe. And how foolish my uncle is with his notes and promises! As if I could not trust my princely husband!"

She used the new title with an affected laugh.

"I am now the Princess of Orange," she added.

"Yes, Highness," said Rénée. She was weary from the long hours of standing; her head ached from the noise of the drums and trumpets, the glare of all the mingled gems and flashing gold and the bright

colours of the dresses, the intensity of the heat, and lack of food. None of the overworked women had eaten since morning; the kitchens were wholly absorbed in preparations for the wedding feast.

Anne's shrill, excited chatter fell distastefully on the ears of Rénée. 'What will they think of her in Brussels?' she wondered; it seemed grotesque to imagine her the head of the Prince of Orange's gorgeous and extravagant household, the greatest lady in the brilliant Court of the Regent.

But Anne, at least, seemed not to doubt at all of coming triumphs; as she was arrayed she talked incessantly of her future glories.

She now wore a gown of blue satin with an overskirt of silver brocade worked with raised yellow roses, her bodice was one stiff piece of silver as if she was encased in the precious metal itself, her long yellow sleeves were caught together and fastened with sapphire studs; her bosom was bare, but round her throat was a fine ruff reaching to her ears and sparkling with little brilliants, her hair was confined under a cap of silver tissue, and from her shoulders hung a mantle of darker yellow satin with a great collar of rose velvet and a lining of blue.

Thus she returned to the great hall where covers for fifty were laid, ten at each table, and the first course of twenty-five dishes being immediately served, she took her place beside her husband, who wore crimson satin cut over violet cloth of gold, and so sewn with gold that no more than a gleam of the stuff was visible. The Elector's choir began to play a gay measure, and twelve young counts with gold wreaths on their heads brought forward the wine, the water, the napkins for the use of the bride and groom.

It was now past six, and the great heat diminishing. Rénée and the other women went slowly about the Princess's apartments, putting

straight the disorder, and beginning to lay by the gowns in the long travelling coffers; the sound of the bridal music came faintly to their ears, and faintly they could savour the mingled odours of the extravagant wedding dishes. As they moved about their task they ate cakes and comfits, having little hope of a supper that night, and in a tired, disjointed way they talked together.

"She is quite right, he is very handsome," said one, "and very magnificent too. They say he is greatly in debt."

"Well, there will not be much of her fortune left to repair holes in his," replied another. "Such extravagance! And she looks all the uglier for it all. And I hear he is fond of pretty women." The speaker glanced with some satisfaction at her own pleasing reflection in Anne's mirror.

"Was his first wife well favoured?"

"Well, she was straight and had a quiet tongue."

"Herr Jesus! Why should he wed Fraulein Anne?" cried another damsel, wearily seating herself. "Not for her beauty, nor her money--"

"For their 'reasons of State,'" quoted Rénée, "and also because he does not know her. This will prove an ugly marriage. He does not look a man to suffer a curst wife."

"Perhaps she will be sweeter now," replied the other.

"There is no sweetness in her," said a third, gathering up the bunches of lavender, allspice leaves, rosemary, and orris-root that were to be laid among the bride's clothes in the long carved caskets.

"How my head aches!" said Rénée.

"It is her voice," replied one of the women, "it rings in the head like the clanging of a brass bell. Come and see the dancing. We can leave this work for a while."

Rénée and three of her companions slipped away and went by the back entrances to the gallery overlooking the Grand Hall; the soldiers allowed them to pass, and the pages brought them sugar sticks, fruit, and comfits left from the feast.

"I am sickened with sweets to-day," said Renée, with a faint smile. She rested her elbows on the carved balustrade of the gallery and looked down.

The tables had been removed and the hall cleared for dancing; the summer sun still shone without, but had left the high windows, and already lamps, hanging to the ceiling bosses by gold chains, were lit, sending a soft light over the polished floor and silk hangings on the wall; the choir was singing and playing, and the Court and guests were moving through one of the elaborate figures of the prearranged dances. The ladies in their great farthingales, stiff bodices, and long trains, the gentlemen in their huge ruffs, formal cloaks, embroidered doublets, and gleaming chains, moved slowly and precisely through the intricacies of the dance, as if they traced some complicated pattern on the floor with their fine and sparkling shoes.

To Renée they seemed as if they were being moved by invisible strings from the dark ceiling--so many puppets moving with stiff grace and immobile dignity.

She sought out the rose red and gold figure of the Prince of Orange; he was dancing with the Electress. She noticed that he moved with more spirit and gaiety than any of the others; also that he kept bad time to the music, and more than once was a little out of step in the long galliard he had not previously rehearsed.

The dance at an end the bride and groom returned to their gold couch, and a band of maidens in green and purple entered the hall and presented them with long sheaves of lilies bound with silver cords, round bunches of crimson and white roses, sprays of myrtle blossom, and parcels of sweets in gold tissue.

After this the Chamberlain clapped his hands and a party of masquers ran in, curiously habited as Turks, Russians, fools, bird-snarers, and giants, and began executing a fantastic measure.

"The Prince brought them from the Netherlands," said one of the waiting-women.

"It is a silly show," replied Rénée, "or else I have no heart for these things."

She left the gallery and returned to Anne's temporary apartments, which would no longer be used, as others had been prepared for the Prince and Princess. Rénée mechanically sorted and folded the confusion of garments, locked away the hastily discarded jewels, arranged the brushes, combs, unguents, crimping irons, curling sticks, powders, perfumes, that had been used in the adornment of the bride, then opened the curtains and stepped out of the narrow window on to the little curved balcony that overlooked the market square.

The pale purple sky spread, stainless of cloud, above the roofs, gables, and towers; the bells were ringing gay peals from all the chiming belfries of Leipsic; joy-fires flared up here and there against the crystal light of the stars; the breeze was perfumed with the scent of summer and still sun-warmed. Rénée was not thinking of the gaiety and loveliness of the festival night; through her mind ran a few sentences she had overheard from two Netherlander of the Prince's suite as she went up the back staircase to see the dancing.

"How long will these feasts last?" one had said. "The Cardinal plays his own game at home—it would be well to return immediately."

"They say he will persuade the King to enforce the Inquisition," the other answered, "so resolute is he to extirpate heresy."

And the two men had looked stern, gloomy, and anxious for guests at a bridal feast, and Rénée recalled their words with a bitter shudder.

It was the Inquisition that had arrested her father and handed him over to his death; it was the Inquisition that had confiscated his entire property and left her mother and herself dependent on charity.

Her face grew hard and almost fierce.

"Extirpate heresy," she said half aloud. "Well, I will die that way too."

The joyfires sprang up and the bells and the music blended; presently the stars faded in the light of the risen moon.

St. Batholomew's Day was over and the famous marriage accomplished at last.

V - WILLIAM OF ORANGE

The morrow of the wedding, in the still early hours before the tourneys, mummings, and festivals had begun, while Anne was in the hands of women again being combed, perfumed, and arrayed for the gaieties of the day, the Prince left the town hall unattended and crossed the market square to the handsome residence where his brothers were lodged. Count Louis and Count Adolphus were still abed, weary with dancing and feasting, but Count John was in the great library of the house writing letters. This Nassau was a fine

member of his fine race, well-made, alert, with intelligent noble features, though blunter than those of his brothers and too broad for perfect comeliness; his eyes were dark and unusually brilliant, his close hair and moustaches light brown; he had not the great courtliness and magnificence of William nor the singular charm of his younger brother, but he was a very frank, open, high-minded gentleman of a winning appearance, though somewhat grave for his twenty-five years.

He still wore his morning gown of purple velvet with great sleeves purflewed in gold; like all his house he was eminently a grand seigneur.

When his brother entered he rose and greeted him with real affection.

Although William had so early left his home for a new faith and more splendid fortunes, which had made him an intimate of an Emperor and placed him high above all his family in rank, his relations with his parents and his brothers and sisters had always remained warm and sincere. The recent death of his father had left him Count of Nassau and head of the Dillenburg branch of his house, and his brothers regarded him with augmented devotion and affection both as their hereditary chief and the most famous and brilliant wearer of their name.

"So early?" said Count John.

"I had news from Mechlin last night," said William, who had his agents everywhere. "Did you hear?"

"Nay," replied his brother. "How should I hear anything yesterday save jests and compliments? How is little Anne?"

William raised his brows and smiled; he moved to the sunny window, and seated himself in the red-cushioned embrasure. John, with a quick excuse, returned to finish his letter which was to his mother at Dillenburg, giving her an account of yesterday's ceremony.

The Prince looked out on to the market square; the long tension of his marriage negotiations being now over, he felt a kind of disappointment mingled with his relief, almost as if in his heart he doubted if this much-disputed match had been worth the immense pains he had taken to forward it. Hitherto his relations with women had always been pleasant; he had been first married, when he was seventeen, to Anne of Egmont, the wealthy heiress of the Van Burens. Her hand had not been sought by him, but had been in the nature of a magnificent gift from the favour of the Emperor. Anne, however, had been gentle, prudent, tender, and he had lived with her in contentment and peace; the other women whom he had known or courted since her death had all had some quality to attract or enthrall. He was a knight who could choose among the finest by reason of his person as well as of his rank, and his taste had always led him to the gay, the magnificent, the loving. The few hours since he had met his bride yesterday had seemed to show him a specimen of womanhood with which he was unfamiliar; the fretful, deformed, passionate, and ignorant girl who was now his wife a little bewildered, a little troubled him. Already he had been stung by her tactless exhibition of the pride that could rate him her inferior, already he had winced a little at the unattractiveness her hysteric excitement and her oversumptuous attire had emphasized.

Count John closed up and sealed his letter, then glanced at William, who still sat thoughtfully; the sun was over him from head to foot, and sparkled in the thick waves of his chestnut hair and in the bronze and gold threads of the dark-green damask doublet he wore.

"What news from Mechlin?" asked the younger brother.

"Granvelle made a public entry to celebrate his appointment as archbishop," replied William briefly. "No one of consequence was there, and the people went into their houses and put the shutters up."

"It is believed that he will enforce the Inquisition in the Netherlands," remarked John thoughtfully.

"He most assuredly will," said William. "He seems to have unbounded influence with the King."

John looked at him and hesitated; he saw that his brother was unusually grave, and he had a shrewd guess at the cause, but he did not venture to probe William's unusual reserve.

"What did you come to speak of?" he ventured at last.

"Of Cardinal Granvelle," answered William, looking at him.

Count John cast down his brilliant eyes. He was a keen follower of the political events in the Netherlands, and knew perfectly well how matters stood between Cardinal Granvelle and his brother; it was a difficult position, and one that promised great storms in the future.

Anthony Perrenot, at first Bishop of Arras, recently created Archbishop of Mechlin and Cardinal Granvelle, had at one time been an intimate and supporter of William of Orange, and was still by the world considered his friend; his brother had been William's tutor, and numbers of his relatives held posts and offices in William's lavish and magnificent household. The Prince as Stadtholder of Holland, Utrecht, and Zeeland, and member of the State Council, and the priest as the most powerful member of all the three Boards which advised and controlled Margaret of Parma--Philip's recently-appointed Regent in the Netherlands--had been much brought together, and at first had works as colleagues and friends. But lately

Granvelle's violence toward heresy, his smiling insolence, his rapacity, his underhand intrigues with Philip had alienated him from William, who was averse to persecution, and, moreover, since their last stormy parting in the streets of Flushing, no longer in such high favour with his master, Philip. The friendship between Granvelle and William had changed to coolness, then to dislike, and would soon, it seemed, approach open rupture; the priest's new dignities, which set him above all Margaret's councillors who had always regarded him as their inferior (he was the son of a Burgundian commoner)--did not please the Prince, and this triumphal entry into Mechlin during his absence was a piece of defiance on the part of the new Cardinal that further irritated him.

"This Perrenot grows too great," he said now impulsively. "He has the ear of the Regent--" He checked himself, looked at his brother, who was watching him eagerly, and then added, "John, what do you think would happen if the Inquisition were set up in the Netherlands as it is in Spain?"

"The States General, the Councils, the Stadtholders would protest."

"And if their protests were of no avail?"

"Then--I do not know," said John gravely.

"The people would revolt," replied William of Orange, "for I tell you nearly all in the Netherlands are at heart of the Reformed Faith. When His Majesty delivered to me my charge, he counselled me to stamp out heresy, and he gave me several papers containing lists of those suspected--there were many hundreds of them. Some great ones I warned. And I burned the lists. But Cardinal Granvelle has already ferreted out many whose names were thereon."

"I did not know of this," exclaimed John.

"Lock it in your heart," said the Prince. "I was bred a heretic," he added, with a smile.

"You have always seemed one of us to me," returned the brother simply, "and never a true Papist."

"Oh, I am a good Catholic," said William, looking out of the window, "but I do not think any man should lose his life for his faith, nay, nor his property nor his honours. I believe in tolerance, John, and there are few of that mind."

"It would be a monstrous thing if you should become a persecutor," said Count John, "seeing our father was the first Prince to bring the Reformed Faith into Germany."

"Had I been of that inclination," replied the Prince, "I should not have made this match. What do you think was the reason of it, if not the alliance of Saxony and Cassel these Protestant States?" He rose now and, looking very earnestly at his brother, came forward into the room.

"John," he said, narrowing his eyes a little, "it is in my heart to tell you of something I have as yet told no man. And do you keep it secret, even from our brothers, who are as yet very young."

"Speak what you wish; it stays with me," replied Count John.

"It is this then: When I and the Duke of Alva were hostages in France, there was an occasion when I was with King Henry hunting--in the forest of Vincennes it was--and we two being apart from the others, the King fell to talking of the peace between him and King Philip, and his great eagerness for the concluding of this.

"Then, drawing on in his discourse, he did disclose to me a deep

design there was between him and my King to exterminate heretics which design the Duke of Alva was privy to and arranging with him, and he thought I too knew of it, so discussed it with me. And it seemed that this secret project was no less than to destroy all heretics in the realms of France and Spain, and to so uproot the doctrines of Luther that they would never grow again. And this, he said, might be partly done by a general slaughter of these heretics, but the time was not yet ripe. And from his speech I understood that if one looked but askance at an image he might be cast into the flames."

"And you--what did you do?" asked John, startled.

"I feigned that I knew as he thought I did, marked and noted what he said, and breathed no word of it," replied the Prince simply, as if such self-control and astuteness were the commonest things.

Count John was silent with astonishment and interest.

"And therefore, as you remember," continued William, "as soon as I was returned I did influence the States General to beg the King to send forth the foreign soldiery, which he could not well refuse."

"Ah, it was you, not the States!" exclaimed John.

"As His Majesty guessed," smiled William. "'Not the States, but you--you!' he said,--in the second person, John. That was in a Flushing street, and I left him there and would not see him to his ship."

"But since then he has been as favourable to you as always," said Count John anxiously, "even in the matter of this marriage, which was hateful to him, he gave in and sent you a gift."

"Yet," replied the Prince, "he would put me and the other Stadtholders beneath the foot of Granvelle, who is, I do not doubt, his

chosen instrument to commence this work of exterminating heresy in the States."

"And you?"

"I was much dismayed when first I heard from King Henry of this ruthless policy, for I knew it meant the ruin and death of many virtuous people; and then I resolved I would do what I could for them, especially in the Netherlands. And so I will."

Count John looked slightly surprised to hear his magnificent brother speak with such unwonted gravity.

"Why, who is to withstand King Philip and King Philip's men--such as Granvelle?" he asked rather hopelessly.

"The House of Nassau might do it," smiled William lightly.

"You do not mean to oppose the King?" cried the Count.

"Why, God forbid," said the Prince, in the same tone, "but I might oppose his policies, and I shall certainly put a stone or so in the path of my Lord Cardinal."

"I fear this marriage has done you little good after all," remarked his brother regretfully. "Here is the King and the Regent displeased, and the Landgrave of Cassel angered too. Apart from your religion, he says (his son told me), you have too many debts to take a wife."

"Those same debts must be looked to," said William, in the assurance of a man of unlimited wealth and unassailable position.

"And the story has got abroad," continued the Count ruefully, "of that banquet you gave with the cloth and plates and dishes all of sugar, and the Landgrave is spreading it round Saxony and Cassel as a

proof of your great extravagance."

"And what of these festivities?" laughed William. "Will they not cost every thaler of the Fraulein's dower that has been so much vaunted?"

Count John sighed. The Nassau family had largely built up their present position through prudent and splendid marriages, and he was sorry that his brother, who had married the richest heiress in the Netherlands for his first wife, should not have done more magnificently with his second choice, for he saw nothing to recommend Anne but her rank, her father's fame, and the possible alliance of her Protestant kinsfolk all,—Count John thought, doubtful benefit.

William came up to his brother and placed his shapely hand on his shoulder.

"These debts will be looked to," he repeated. "Wait till I return to Brussels."

The door opened hastily, and Louis and Adolphus entered, both in their light tourney harness, and laughing together from sheer gaiety and amusement.

Adolphus was equipped from head to foot in a crimson padded jousting suit studded with gilt metal nails; he was the youngest of the four, no more than a youth, noble in appearance, and wholly lovable, fairer than his brother in colouring, but of the same slenderness of make.

Both greeted William with great affection, and Louis, who was clattering in gold-embossed cuirass, cuisses, vambraces, and greaves, broke out laughing with the jest that had so diverted him and Adolphus.

"Highness, we want the old magician to foretell the future for us--he has a spirit who can reveal all things; he said he would call it if we wished, and ask what our fate would be!"

"Tush!" said John hastily, "belike it were mummary or else a trick of the Devil."

But William was always ready for curious trials and experiments, though he had strangely little belief in any such things.

"Who is this magician?" he asked gaily.

"A Frenchman who has his abode with the Elector's alchemist," replied Adolphus. "They say he has done wonderful things. The Elector declares he really has such a spirit."

"His Grace is very credulous," remarked Louis. "He will take no action but after he has consulted his charts and his tables, his wheels of fortune and his crystals."

"I believe," persisted John, "that the Devil is in it all."

"Well," declared Adolphus, "the man is coming here to-night before supper, when we shall have a little leisure."

"I will come if I may," said the Prince. "Perhaps I shall have time while Anne is with her tire-women."

He took up his hat and prepared to leave; he saw that there was no chance of a further private talk with John, and he was too much of a courtier to risk being late in his return to the town hall.

As he passed Louis and Adolphus, he put them back against the wall and laughingly criticized their appointments, while John came and leant on his shoulder.

The four brothers, all so young, so charming, so magnificent, so full of noble life and vigour, made a fair picture as they stood so, laughing together from sheer good spirits because this was the lovely morning of their days and none of them had yet known sorrow.

In their slender knightly persons, the very erect carriage of their small heads, their warm colouring, something quick and fiery in their movements, there showed a great likeness between them, proclaiming their common blood, but each was a distinct personality—the Prince, dark, dominant, superb, despite his gay smiling air; John, serious, slightly austere; Louis, graceful, charming, modest, with his long light-brown locks and laughing eyes; Adolphus, blonde, handsome, eager, very princely in bearing.

So, still laughing, they parted, William hastening across the sunny square, where every cap was lifted and every head bent to him, to the town hall.

As he approached the antechamber to his apartments, he saw Anne through an open door.

She was ready clothed for the midday repast and the tourney in a gown of violet cloth of gold veiled in falls of silver lace and finished by a ruff of pure gold thread a foot deep.

William heard her sharp voice raised, and instinctively slackened his step.

A lock of Anne's tresses had caught in the stiff edge of her ruff; one of her women in disengaging it chanced to pull the crimped hair.

Anne turned and smacked the girl's face smartly enough to bring the tears to her eyes.

The Prince saw this little episode, a new type she was indeed, this fierce little cat with her claws always ready, he thought.

As he entered the room Anne became all softness and affection and gentleness.

William saluted her rather absently, but she flushed with joy at his conventional courtly compliments which her inexperience took literally.

"Tell me of Brussels?" she implored, clinging to his arm. "What shall I do in Brussels?"

"Amuse yourself, *ma mie*," replied William lightly, "and learn the courtesies of the country," he added with a gentle sarcasm which was wholly unperceived by the bride.

VI - THE CRYSTAL GAZERS

When Duprès, the alchemist's crystal gazer and spirit raiser, heard that he was commanded to the lodging of the young Counts of Nassau with the object of foretelling their future, he gave one of his usual whimsical smiles, as if he despised the credulity and curiosity of those who sought him, and proceeded to pack up his magic table.

Vanderlinden, who had found his colleague's spirits more tantalizing and vexing than helpful, tried to dissuade him from putting his powers to the proof before such reckless young cavaliers "who have no respect nor taste for holy things," he said, "and mean but to mock and jest at the spirits."

But the Frenchman was a mysterious creature given to whims and impulses and secretive ways, and wholly beyond the control of the alchemist who kept him for his undoubted gifts, but found him the

most trying of companions and allies.

On this occasion he made no answer to his master's protests, but continued his preparations.

"This is Count Adolphus," complained Vanderlinden. "All the while Count Louis was at Dresden he showed no wish to consult the spirits."

This was quite true. Louis of Nassau had no turn for the mystical, and the scant leisure allowed him by his brother's marriage negotiations had been employed in more full-blooded amusement than that of spirit raising.

His eagerness for reckless adventure had, however, caused him to at once accede to his brother's suggestion that they should put to the test the powers of the Elector's magician (as they called him).

"I hear the Prince of Orange will be present also," said Vanderlinden, vexed, "and he is a great person and not one to be lightly brought into affairs of this kind."

Duprès gave no answer; his strange, dry, and rather impudent face was wrinkled with a smile.

"Well, you do it without my sanction," remarked Vanderlinden, who knew he could not control his unruly assistant, and, drawing his robes about him, he retired to his turret.

Before he set out for the Counts' house, Duprès, after his wont, looked up the careers of the personages who had called upon him in a great notebook which was always with him, and in which he had gathered details of all the notable people of Europe.

Of three of the brothers there was little to be said; they were too

young to have had any career, and were merely great nobles, born and bred in the Reformed Faith, all unmarried, and residing in the ancestral castle at Dillenburg together with the youngest brother, Henry, and seven sisters, of whom one, Catherine, had recently married the Count of Schwartzenburg, who had been Louis's joint envoy at Dresden.

Louis himself had lived largely at Brussels under the protection of his brother, and in an official position (despite his faith) under Philip's government.

This was all there was to be said of these three, but William of Orange occupied a conspicuous and unique position, and had already had a career of exceptional brilliance.

There was much about him in Duprès' notebooks.

He seemed indeed Fortune's favourite.

Through the Nassaus he came of a family that was one of the most illustrious in Europe. One of their members had worn the Imperial crown; others, as Dukes of Guelders, had been sovereigns in the Netherlands hundreds of years before the House of Burgundy, to whom Philip owed his throne, had ruled there; Engelbert of Nassau had been one of the councillors of Charles the Bold; his eldest son had been the confidential friend of the great Emperor Charles V, and had largely helped to place the Imperial crown on the head of his master.

He had further increased the splendour of his house by a marriage with Claude de Chalons, heiress of her brother, Philibert, Prince of Orange; his son, René de Nassau Chalons, succeeded to the united possessions of Nassau and Orange, and, dying young and childless in the Emperor's arms at the battle of St. Dizier, bequeathed all

these honours to his boy cousin William, the present Prince, and eldest son of Count William, younger brother of René's father Henry, head of the branch of Nassau Dillenburg and of Juliana of Stolberg, his wife.

The price of Charles's consent to René's will was that the young heir to such power should be brought up a Papist under his own eyes, and to this, his father, though now a Protestant, had, in the interests of his son, consented, and the young Lutheran, at the age of eleven, was sent to the Imperial Court to be educated and trained.

He soon enjoyed a remarkable degree of favour with the Emperor, and at the age of seventeen was given the hand of Anne, daughter of Maximilian van Buren and the richest heiress in the Netherlands, soon afterwards being appointed, over the heads of many tried and splendid soldiers, commander-in-chief of the Imperial forces on the frontier—a post that he filled to the Emperor's satisfaction.

He had been further distinguished by being the support of Charles on the occasion of that monarch's flamboyant public abdication, and by having been deputed to carry the Imperial Insignia to the new Emperor, Ferdinand.

Immediately on the accession of Philip he had been employed by him to negotiate the peace with France, which was soon after signed, and which he had conducted in a manner highly satisfactory to Spain, leaving the King considerably in his debt, for the peace was a triumphant one for Philip.

The Prince had been selected (with the Duke of Alva) as one of the hostages given by Spain to France, and, immediately on his return from Paris, had strenuously supported the States in their demand for the removal of Spanish troops from the Netherlands, thereby putting himself in sudden and unexpected opposition to Philip, from whom,

on that King's departure from the Netherlands, he had parted with considerable coolness.

He retained, however, the Stadtholdership of three important provinces, and remained a member of the State Council who advised the Regent.

Lately, the Saxon marriage was supposed to have embittered his already strained relations with the King, who had, however, recently given his consent to the match, and even sent a sum of money to the Regent to buy a ring for the bride. He was believed to be estranged from the arbitrary and stern measures of the new Cardinal, and to favour the ancient liberties of the Netherlands and tolerance for the heretics.

For the rest he was the most magnificent grandee in the Low Countries, his splendid hospitality was famous, his table renowned in Europe, his cooks coveted by Philip—who was a greater glutton than any man in his own kingdoms—his debts were supposed to be huge, but there was never any stint in the lavish extravagance with which he kept up his princely residences, and his fortune, together with that left him by his first wife, was known to be enormous; his revenues were but one-third less than those the King drew from the Netherlands.

As Prince of Orange, he was a sovereign ruler, owing allegiance to no one; his other titles were perhaps more numerous than those any noble in Europe could boast.

As his father's heir, he was Count of Nassau and head of the Dillenburg branch of that ancient house; he was also Count of Catzenellenbogen, Count of Brabant, Marquis of Ter Veere, Viscount of Antwerp; as heir to the Orange, Beaux, and Chalons families, he claimed the kingdom of Aries, the dukedom of Gramine, three principalities, two margraveships, two viscountships, sixteen

countships, more than fifty baronies, and three hundred lordships, and though most of these French titles were but shadowy honours, he drew a princely revenue from his estates in Franche-Comte, and his claim to the lands in Dauphine had been admitted. He also owned estates in Brabant, Luxembourg, and Flanders, and all the property of the Van Burens which his first wife had been able to leave him. He was a knight of the Golden Fleece--that sumptuous and princely order--a Grandee of Spain, Stadtholder of three provinces, a member of Margaret's Council, and had been, until their withdrawal, commander, with Lamoral Egmont, Prince of Gravern, of all the Spanish troops in the Netherlands, as he had been commander-in-chief during the late war with France.

Such was the outward history of this Prince, who, though still in his first youth, was already so unusually distinguished both by his fortunes, his position, his magnificence, his charm.

"One of the great ones of the earth," remarked Duprès, carefully locking away the notebook after having committed to memory the leading points in William's career. The spirits did not always prove tractable, and when they were dumb Duprès was always ready to satisfy the inquirer with a few judiciously vague replies of his own composition. He indeed cheated so often, so shamelessly, and so skilfully that Vanderlinden had lately lost all faith in him, and for this reason alone had been reluctant that Duprès should experiment before the young Princes.

The alchemist, whose position under the Elector was his sole revenue, was in constant fear of losing it through some trick or freakish jest on the part of his assistant.

He made, however, no further attempt to interfere (knowing well enough that it was hopeless), and towards the appointed hour Duprès, with the two apprentices--sour at having been summoned

early from the tourney--behind him carrying the magic table, went forth into the sunny dusty streets filled with merry idle crowds in their best clothes, most of whom were discussing the prowess of the Elector at the jousts, His Grace having held the field against all comers, and shivered the spears of many a famous knight.

Reaching the Counts' lodging Duprès dismissed the two young men, and himself proceeded to unpack his table.

The cavaliers had not yet returned from the tourney, but Duprès was served very civilly with wine and comfits.

The room into which he had been admitted was a fairly small cabinet, panelled in dark oak, and looking on the garden. It could be lit by a lamp depending by a copper chain from the centre of the ceiling; there was neither fireplace nor candle sconces. The furniture was composed merely of a few black chairs, a table, and an armoir.

The spirit raiser declared himself satisfied with this chamber as the right setting for his experiment, as he modestly called it, but he desired the servants to remove the armoir, lest he should be accused of having an accomplice within (it was large enough to hold a man), and also the table, as he wished to set up his own in place of it. When this was done he asked them to take away all the chairs but five, one for himself and the others for the four princes. He also requested that the shutters should be closed, the lamp lit, and silence kept without during the experience, lest some unusual noise should fright or vex the spirits.

His preparations being now complete, he set himself to nicely adjust the magic table in the interval of waiting.

This table was a curious and precious object, and Duprès had carried it with him through many adventures and over the greater part

of Europe. It was of sweet wood, three feet high, and set on four legs, each of which was set on a seal of pure wax engraved with a mystical sign and the seven names of God, the whole put on a thick square of red and gold changeable silk; in the centre of the table was another of the seals, larger and more deeply imprinted, and over this was a red silk cover with knots of gold at the four corners; in the centre of this cloth was a large crystal ball, egg-shaped, and of a most special brightness.

Duprès now wrote certain characters with sacred oil on the legs of the table, and all was complete. The spirit raiser--or skryer, as he had been called in England--was himself attired in a plain black coat and breeches with velvet half-socks of a purple colour, a plain band and a black skull cap, an attire which he affected to give him an air of greater gravity.

Soon after the appointed hour, laughter, the jingle of spurs, the clink of armour sounded without, and the young Counts impetuously entered the apartment.

William of Orange, to Duprès' secret satisfaction, was with his brothers, but Count John was missing; in his place was a youth still in dusty armour with a face fresh as a rose. Duprès knew him for Duke Christopher, son of the Elector Palatine, and as this substitution upset his calculations he demanded why Count John had not come?

"He was afraid of the Devil, Dominus," replied the young Duke, as they all seated themselves, laughing, on the five chairs placed in a row ready for them.

"As to that," replied Duprès coldly, "I would have Your Grace know that I keep no such company. I associate with neither imps nor hell-hounds, being no conjurer nor magician, as the vulgar may suppose, but a good mathematician, alchemist, and astrologer, which are

noble sciences and have accomplished great marvels, as, notably, the brazen head of Albertus Magnus which could speak the sphere of Archimedes, the dove of Archytas, and the wheel of Vulcan. And for myself I have seen clay birds that fly and iron insects that crawl."

With that he seated himself before the magic table, and the young Princes, who had but a little while to spare before the evening festivities called them, besought him to hasten.

The skryer looked at them over the crystal ball; they were pleasant to see in their youth, their splendour, their comeliness and gaiety, as princely and as fair a company as could well be brought together.

All were in their light armour with silk scarves and jewelled chains and ladies' favours tied to their arms, save only William, who wore a suit of green cloth of gold with pearl embroidery on the sleeves, a scarf of violet, and a mantle of black velvet. He leaned forward, his elbow on his knee, his dark face in his fine hand, looking at the skryer; at his breast was a cluster of roses, and their perfume filled the small chamber.

"Oh, ye great ones," thought Duprès, "what is before you but idleness, luxury, and pomp? Wherefore should ye seek to know the future--your ways are very clear set before you."

He asked one to lower the lamp, and Adolphus rose and pulled the string; a dim, but clear, light now filled the chamber.

"I would have you notice, princely seigneurs," said Duprès, "that I am not in communication with any but good angels; from the seven names of God proceed seven angels, and from each letter of their names proceed seven more angels--from the male letters, male angels; from the female letters, female angels. And they are unable to speak anything but the truth, coming as they do from God's

footstool. They are to be regarded with awe, humility, and reverence. Which of them will come, I know not, but whoever it be, I beseech your friendly Graces to observe a decent silence and a discreet behaviour."

He then set his elbows on the table, clasped his hands about his brow, and gazed into the crystal. At first he beheld nothing but the gold curtain which usually at first concealed the spirit world from his view, and this remained for a while until he was beginning to fear that the spirits would not come to-day, and that to satisfy these young men he must resort to trickery, which was dangerous, difficult, and fatiguing.

Presently, however, the gold curtain was caught together and hurled into the centre of the globe which changed to a luminous colour, like amber with a light behind it, and began to throb and pulse with radiance, so that Duprès looked into an immense distance of pure gold like the strongest sunshine, troubled by changing, moving forms which seemed to turn together, mingle, and then again separate.

The globe itself gave forth a strong glow, which illuminated the head and face of the skryer as if he sat in front of a lamp, and rendered pale by contrast the light hanging above him.

Adolphus pointed out this mysterious light to the others, and they leant forward in a tense silence.

"I see," said Duprès, "two of the spirits, Volvangel and Kendrick--they are walking together hand in hand."

"What is their appearance?" asked Duke Christopher.

"Volvangel wears a black suit of tabinet," replied the skryer, "a little sword, and his hair falling down long, also slippers of a red colour;

the other angel is more fantastical and has a doublet of white satin cut into points below the belt, and yellow hose."

"Methinks they lack dignity," said Count Louis, who had expected something more strange and awe-inspiring; "surely these are bad spirits or imps."

"They are good angels," returned Duprès coldly; "the ill angels have but three letters in their names; but if Your Graces are not silent these will not speak."

At this the young knights forbore, and the skryer continued to gaze into the crystal which now appeared a ball of fire.

"They speak," he said; "they reprove the princely Counts for playing with eternal mysteries in a spirit of lightness. Kendrick says, 'Is life so long that you can be so careless of time? Be careful in your comings and in your goings, lest you waste precious moments, and death come upon you unawares, and snatch you away in your prime.' Volvangel says, 'Why would you know the future? It is better not to draw the curtain.' And now they fall to pieces as if they were of ashes, and there is no more of them."

The globe was now radiating such intense light that though it was motionless it appeared to spin in its place. Duke Christopher rose and put out the lamp, but the chamber remained lit with a delicate, soft, and flickering glow.

The skryer now appeared of an ashy paleness, drops of sweat stood on his brow, his lips trembled. He spoke again in a hoarse and unnatural voice--

"Liliana has arisen; it is a female angel, very witty and wise--she is coming into the room."

A broad beam of golden light projected from the globe and fell, like the vast blade of a sword, against the dimmer light of the chamber.

"It is Liliana," repeated the skryer. "She runs about the room."

There was a moment's utter silence, then Adolphus unexpectedly cried out--

"I see her! She wears a gown of flowered tabinet and yellow hair rolled up in front and hanging long behind!--"

"That is she," said Duprès. "She is standing now by the knee of His Highness, and she bids him remember that the angels of God are more to be believed than any priest or Pope."

"She fades!" cried Adolphus. "She changes into a wheel of fire--she breaks--she goes!"

"She has returned to the crystal," said the skryer. "She asks what you want of her?"

"Let us know the future," said Count Louis. "Let us know the fate of the four who sit here not from wanton curiosity or irreverent meddling in matters beyond us--but that, with God's help, we may know how to shape our lives as becomes men and Princes."

"She says," replied Duprès, in the same tense tone, "that it is best you should not know, but she can answer your questions--one question to each knight."

Adolphus spoke first--

"Shall I gain honour before I die?"

"The answer is--'Great honour.'"

"Who will our wives be?" asked Duke Christopher.

"The answer is--'All three shall die unwed.'"

Louis of Nassau, almost as pale as the skryer, raised his fair face as he put his question--

"Will the House of Nassau endure, or fall into decay?"

"The answer is 'This House will endure as long as there are Princes on earth.'"

William of Orange spoke now; it was the first word he had said since the skryer had commenced--

"What manner of death shall we die?"

"Liliana says she may not tell, but that in the crystal will come visions."

"Enough, enough," cried Adolphus, rising. "I will not meddle with these matters--"

But the others caught him back to his seat.

"Hear it to the end," said Louis.

The strong beam had now disappeared from the globe, which burnt suddenly dim with a sullen fire that lit the red table-cover and left the rest of the room in darkness; the skryer now seemed to be in a trance or swoon, he swayed to and fro the crystal, his face was blank as virgin paper, his eyes like glass.

"I see blood," he muttered, "nothing but blood and black horses--and men. It is a battle--the sun is setting--again the blood, there are four

knights trampled under the horses--one is taken from the melée and his bones laid in holy ground. The other three disappear--there is search for them, they are not found. They are all young. The blood and smoke clears. I see trees, I see an older man, worn, grey, murdered there is great lamentation--and now the black curtain falls--falls."

All the light in the globe went out, and the skryer dropped forward across the magic table. William sprang up, opened the door, and called for lights.

A servant instantly brought a lamp.

Louis and Christopher were calmly in their places, but Adolphus had his head bowed forward in his hands and was shuddering.

"Herr Jesus! I saw her!" he murmured. "A little maid--and is there a bloody death for all of us?"

But William's serene laugh, the flood of light, the stir and move of ordinary things about them swept away the sense of dread and mystery; the skryer sighed, stirred from his stupor, and began packing up his appliances. He did not seem disposed to speak and the knights did not urge it; they severally left to change their armour, on which still lay the dust of the tourney.

The Prince lingered last; he put a purse of thalers into Duprès' hand and thanked him courteously.

"Seigneur," said the skryer with emotion, "I will tell no one but I will tell you, who are a very prudent Prince, that those knights I saw slain had the faces of your brothers--of Count Louis, Count Adolphus, and one who is not here, and Duke Christopher."

"And the murdered man?" asked William, turning on him his powerful eyes.

"It was Your Highness," replied Duprès, bowing his head.

"All of us!" said the Prince lightly. "Was it John you saw, or Henry--that third cavalier?"

"It was not His Grace, John, but one younger whom I have never seen."

"It was a fearful vision," said William, "and maybe it was but some distempered fancy. Yet," he added, with sudden gravity, "if honour called, the House of Nassau would make even the sacrifice you saw prefigured."

He smiled at the skryer in the fashion which made all men his friends, and hastened away to the festivals at the town hall.

Again the city belfries rocked with the ringing of the joy-bells, again the summer night was lit with splendid illuminations, and all the sweet languor of this rich season of the year was blended with the magnificence of princely rejoicings.

The young grandee crossing the town square lifted his eyes to the stars and gazed at those three which form a diamond sword in the heavens.

VII - BRUSSELS

After the third day of tourney had completed the marriage festivities, the Prince of Orange, his bride, and their train--swelled now by Anne's attendants--set out for Brussels.

Vanderlinden was among the magnificent assembly who wished them God-speed, and he found occasion to hand Rénée le Meung a charm in the shape of the figure seven cut in jade and set with little studs of gold. This would, he said, keep her from harm while she resided in Brussels, for seven was the lucky number of that city which was under the direct influence of the seven planets, and owned seven churches, seven gates, and seven senators.

Rénée thanked him with tears in her eyes and a sad smile on her lips as she turned to leave the land that had been a refuge, even if in exile, and set her face towards her own country which was so full of peril for her and contained unutterable memories.

Already, from those in the Prince's train and from such Saxons as had been in Brussels, she had heard much of the state of affairs in the Low Countries. The Inquisition, which the late Emperor had established in the Netherlands, had always been resisted, notably in Brabant (into two of the provinces it had never been introduced), with such effect that, though an avowed heretic (as was Rénée's father) was certain to be apprehended, yet many who were not of the orthodox faith had managed to live quietly and unmolested. Now, however, it was being enforced with great severity by Philip's orders and Granvelle's warm support, and the chief Inquisitor, Peter Titelmann, was performing his office with the ruthlessness and cruelty of Torquemada himself.

Every one even suspected of heresy, anyone who did not bow low enough when the Host passed, anyone who read the Bible or ventured to criticize the priests or preach any contrary doctrines, was at once seized by Titelmann, accused before his secret Tribunal from which there was no appeal, tortured to force a confession, and finally put to death in the most horrid fashion the monks could devise.

Already this monstrous tyranny was spreading over the Low

Countries with a combined force and power impossible to resist, the religious force of the Pope, the secular force of the King behind it. Already Titelmann, Granvelle, the Regent, the King, were rejoicing that they were tearing up by the roots the seed that Martin Luther had planted; already some of the most splendid and prosperous towns in Europe were being devastated with executions, fines, confiscations, and the spectacle of tortured men, women, and children flung living into the flames with Marot's hymns on their lips and the light of undiminished faith in their eyes.

And this was only the beginning.

There was no length to which the King was not prepared to go to re-establish the pure Catholic faith in his dominions. He was willing to depopulate cities, render barren the countryside, ruin the trade from which he drew so handsome a revenue, force into revolt the people who had been his father's faithful subjects--in brief, to utterly destroy and scatter one of the bravest, most prosperous, most intelligent, most thrifty nations of Europe rather than see them tainted with the doctrines of Luther or Calvin.

And to this resolve Cardinal Granvelle gave his enthusiastic support.

Rénée heard enough of the prelate to realize that he was nearly as dreaded and disliked as Titelmann himself, and that to him was ascribed the enforcing of the Inquisition and the creation of the hated new bishoprics by which the supremacy of the true faith was to be enforced and the organization of the Inquisition maintained. It was from the creation of these bishoprics and his own elevation to the See of Mechlin and then to the Cardinal's Hat, that the growth of the breach between Anthony Perrenot and his one-time patron, the Prince of Orange, might be traced; and Rénée learnt that William, together with Lamoral Egmont, Prince of Graven and Stadtholder of Artois and Flanders (abetted by Philip de Montmorency, Count

Hoorne, then at the Spanish Court), had actually written a letter to Philip protesting against the increasing insolence and presumption of the Cardinal, and that the King on receiving the message had warmly defended Granvelle, and so abused Count Hoorne that that nobleman had hardly been able, from wrath and amazement, to leave the royal presence. These circumstances, which were common talk in the Netherlands, and rousing immense interest and speculation, caused Rénée to regard her new master with added curiosity, with a growing respect; from the first moment she had seen him she had felt his charm, now she began to surmise his power.

Along the journey she marked his patience, gentleness, and courtesy with Anne's unreasonable jealous affection, peevish tempers, and fits of hysteric gloom. Some of the other women laughed at so much softness, but Rénée admired this gentleness in one whom she knew could be masterful and believed could be fierce, but it had the effect of rousing her former half-compassionate indifference towards Anne into active dislike.

Never had the sickly bad-tempered girl seemed so hateful to Rénée as she did now when plaguing the husband she professed to adore, chattering over her coming triumphs in Brussels, and boasting of her new rank and dignities. She seemed to see in the magnificent and tumultuous scene on to which she was about to enter only a stage on which to display her own enormous vanity, and her infinite petty questions and speculations as to her position in relation to the Regent and the ladies of her Court fatigued Rénée almost beyond endurance, for the waiting-woman's mind was full of the great problems now agitating her native country, and of the coming struggle between Prince and Cardinal, of which Anne was so entirely in ignorance.

When they reached the beautiful plains of Brabant, and the hill-built capital, Anne fell ill from the excess of her own spleen and passions,

and it was on a litter that she was carried into her husband's gorgeous home on the heights of Brussels.

This was an establishment that filled Rénée with astonishment, and was indeed much more splendid than even the Saxon Princess had ever expected.

Situated in the most beautiful part of the ornate and rich city, and amid the residences of other great nobles, the Nassau palace formed a fitting scene for the festivals, the hospitality, the pageants provided by one of the most wealthy and generous Princes in Europe.

The turreted and gabled mansion, crowned by a tower or belfry, and built in the most elaborate style of Gothic art, stood in fine gardens filled with statues, fountains, pleasant walks, exotic shrubs, summer-houses, and fishponds, all laid out at great expense and lavishly maintained.

The rooms, halls, galleries, and cabinets were most handsomely and luxuriously furnished with all the famous rich splendour of the Netherlands; tapestries, hangings, pictures by the most renowned artists; carpets, rugs, objects from the East and the Indies; all the ornate beauty that taste could desire and wealth execute, distinguished the dwelling of the Prince of Orange.

The household, with stewards, secretaries, clerks, musicians, chaplains, falconers, huntsmen, gardeners, cooks, valets, pages, servants, and now augmented by Anne's women, amounted to over a thousand persons, and one of the most lavish and famous features of the establishment was the perpetual banquet kept in one of the halls, from which extravagant hospitality was indiscriminately extended to all comers at any hour of the day and night. The dishes, fruits, confectionery, and wines were constantly replenished, but never

removed.

In this household, beside which that of the Elector was simple indeed, Rénée felt herself utterly alien and overwhelmed; but during the first days of her residence there, while in attendance on Anne's nervous illness, she observed, as closely as she was able, him who had already so excited her curiosity, namely, the Prince.

She found he was good-tempered with all, loved by all, extravagant, reckless of his own interests, and very much the master.

From her high window, round which the pigeons flew, she would wait for a glimpse of those who came to wait on him: Egmont, the Stadtholder of Artois and Flanders, as magnificent a lord as William himself, and of almost as proud and ancient descent; Count Hoorne, another great seigneur, but a sombre and gloomy man; Brederode, handsome, reckless, usually inflamed with wine; Count Hoorne's brother, the Seigneur de Montigny; and De la Marck, the Seigneur de Lumey,

And Rénée soon perceived that these great nobles were all animated with one object, and that object hatred of Cardinal Granvelle.

How far the Prince was heading these malcontents she could not tell; she noticed that though he was so gay, and appeared so open, he was not reckless in speech, and she divined that he was reserved and prudent in all serious matters; she believed, too, that his position was difficult, even perilous. If so, certainly his new wife contributed nothing to soothe either difficulties or perils; indeed, her behaviour would have hampered any man. In her vanity and arrogance she was ungracious to his friends; she quarrelled with Egmont's wife, who was the sister of the Elector Palatine, on the question of precedence; and she chose to consider herself injured because the Regent kept

her waiting when she first went to pay her duty.

But though she was behaving like a fretful child, she could not fail to be an important pawn in the great game that was beginning to be played in the Netherlands, and Rénée wondered who would try to rouse her to a sense of her position, for at present she was showing capricious favour to the Cardinal's party by patronizing the wives of his creatures, Aerschot and Barlaymont.

The warning, or advice, came most unexpectedly from Sabina of Bavaria, Countess of Egmont, Princess of Gravern--the lady whose only previous acquaintance with Anne had been haughty disputes as to their order of precedency.

But Egmont's wife was not the woman to endanger her husband's interests by feminine vanities; she came personally to offer her friendship to Anne and to instil the good counsel the Saxon Princess so sorely needed.

Anne, though tolerably flattered at the visit, received her rival with the haughtiness she deemed due to her station, retaining with her Rénée and a little German girl who waited on her, and barely rising when the Countess (she was generally known, as was her husband, by her prouder title of Egmont) entered her presence.

Rénée had been told by her mistress that Sabina of Bavaria was an old woman, ill-favoured, but the waiting-woman found that the Countess was as splendid as Anne was mean, as courtly as Anne was rude, as fascinating as Anne was unattractive. After the first few moments of commonplace compliments, it was plain that the Princess of Orange did not know how to behave; she sat in the window-seat eating nuts, which she held in the lap of her brilliant blue satin gown, and the shells of which she cast from her window.

The Countess of Egmont, leaning back in her dark chair, her delicate tired face framed in the high rich ruff, her soft hair threaded with pearls, in all graceful, composed, and gracious, surveyed the Princess through half-closed long eyes and, seeing that all subtlety would be wasted on Anne, came directly to the point.

"Your Highness has already some knowledge of how matters stand in Brussels?" she asked.

"None at all," replied Anne flippantly.

"Naturally Your Highness has had little opportunity," said the Countess pleasantly. "I have been some while at the Court and can enlighten you on some particulars."

"It is best for ladies not to meddle in these matters," remarked Anne.

"Truly, we women play a poor small part in these great affairs," smiled the other lady. "None the less we may be of some use and help. You have observed the great discontent there is against Cardinal Granvelle, how all the seigneurs are against him, especially your lord and mine?"

"The Prince does not talk business with me," said Anne.

The Countess bit her pretty lip.

"I speak as a sister of a Protestant to a Protestant," she continued. "Your ladies are of the Reformed Faith?" she added, glancing at Rénée and the other girl.

"Oh yes," said the Princess, roused at last, "but I assure Your Grace that we shall give no trouble. I have promised to live Catholicly, and I will keep my word."

"I did not mean to speak of that," returned the Countess gently, "only to say that his princely Highness, your husband, has always been considered too lenient to those of the Reformed Faith, has always Count Louis with him, and continually others of his relations who are Lutheran, and this has been used as a handle against him by the Cardinalists, and will be even more so now that he has a Protestant wife."

"And what is the upshot of this speech?" asked Anne, hardly pretending to disguise her impatience.

Egmont's wife replied with the serene grandeur that was so infinitely patient.

"To explain I must weary Your Highness with some business. Cardinal Granvelle is already endeavouring to enforce the Inquisition in the Netherlands--some hundreds have already suffered under his instigation. Now the late Emperor, and the Queen Mary, the late Regent, did promise this should not be, and to break those oaths is against the conscience of many good Catholics and of most of the great lords, save only Aerschot, Barlaymont, and Meghem, who fawn on the Cardinal; but Granvelle wishes to enforce the edicts issued by the late Emperor against heretics, and this the seigneurs consider a fatal course. So there is a powerful party against this priest, and a letter has already been writ to the King against him."

"I hear he is very upstart and of low birth," remarked Anne, who was incapable of grasping the wide aspects of the question put before her.

"That is no matter," smiled Sabina; "he is favourite at Madrid. And he rules the Netherlands, not Madame Parma."

"I heard the Seigneur Brederode speak of him the other day," said

Anne, with an affected laugh. "He made some fine jests on him! He said he wore those fox-tails in his cap as a memory of the old fox, as he called Granvelle, and frequented the masks in a Cardinal's gown to do His Eminence a spite!"

"The Seigneur Brederode is reckless," returned the Countess gravely, "and does us little good."

"Oh, I think he is amusing," said Anne perversely. "He told me some fine stories of the Cardinal," and she laughed coarsely.

Sabina knit her brows.

"Beware of laughing at the Seigneur Brederode's tales," she said. "I tell you his pastimes are dangerous."

Anne shrugged her shoulders as she replied--

"What has your princely Grace to say at the end of this?"

Egmont's wife flushed; she was not used to the rudeness she was so patiently enduring from this ill-bred girl.

"I wish Your Highness to be one of us," she said, "to help us. To be ductile, circumspect, to submit to the Regent--to give no confidences to Aerschot's wife.

"She is my husband's kinswoman," interrupted Anne.

"She is of the Cardinal's party," flashed the Countess, "and they are none of them to be trusted. I appeal to you," she added with dignity, "to stand by us, who are standing by those of your faith. I tell you, King Philip is only waiting for the decision of the Council at Trent to force all his subjects into conformity with the ancient faith--yea, even at the price of depopulating the Netherlands. I tell you no liberty, no

charter, no privilege will be safe, nay, not 'the joyous entry' itself, and we must all turn into persecutors--scourgers in Granvelle's hand--or be ruined."

Anne was now a little frightened; she dimly wondered what her own position would be if all these fearful edicts against heretics were enforced.

"What can I do?" she asked foolishly.

"Bear yourself discreetly flatter the Regent, eschew the Cardinalists--do not encourage Seigneur Brederode."

"I am sure no one takes any notice of what I do," returned Anne. In her heart she was sorry she was not an orthodox Catholic; the sufferings of fellow-heretics did not move her in the least, but she was alarmed at the thought of being involved in any of their misfortunes.

"The actions of the daughter of the Prince who forced the Peace of Passau from the late Caesar must always be important."

Anne was flattered at this; she was always inordinately proud of her famous father, while not sympathizing in the least with the principles or the actions that had made him glorious.

"I will do what I can in the matters you tell me of," she said, "but it was never my husband's wish that I should be troubled with grave business of any kind."

Sabina took this ungracious concession as the utmost she was likely to get; she rose, feeling that the whole interview had been rather useless.

Anne rose too, and as she stood, the bright cruel light of the window

over her, the other woman noted afresh how crooked she was, how sickly, how plain, and was sorry.

And over Anne's shoulder she glanced into the gardens which showed through the open casement, and saw the Prince playing tennis in the sunlit court; his gay spirits, his splendid health, his pleasant handsomeness formed a bitter contrast with his wife. The Countess, with the generosity of the woman who has everything, felt sorry indeed for this woman who had nothing but a position she could not hold, and a husband she could not please.

The ladies parted, and Anne called for wine and sugar, mixed herself a sweet drink, and presently fell into a flushed sleep in the window-seat. She was still asleep when the Prince came up from his game.

He looked at her in silence, rather sternly, rejected Rénée's offer to wake her, and went away.

The waiting-woman kept her distasteful vigil during the rest of the long sunny afternoon. The little German girl crept away; the sounds of the palace came dimly through the shut doors, without the pigeons flew to and fro with a sharp flap of wings, and Rénée sat motionless with locked hands and compressed lips, her mind and soul in the struggle between Granvelle who stood for the tyranny of Philip and the power of Rome, and the great nobles who stood for the liberty of the Netherlands and the protection of the wretched heretics.

VIII - MARGARET OF PARMA

The Governess of the Netherlands, Margaret, daughter of the late Emperor and wife of Ottavio Farnese, Duke of Parma, sat in her chair of state in the small chamber leading to the council room, and before her were the three Netherland nobles who were the avowed

enemies of Granvelle, and who had complained so long and haughtily that they were no longer consulted and that the Regent took advice solely from the Cardinal and his creatures, Barlaymont, President of the Council of Finance, and Viglius, President of the Privy Council.

Margaret favoured the Cardinal; he had an immense influence over her, and she knew him to be as deep in her brother Philip's counsels as his father had been for thirty years in those of the Emperor; but the situation in the Netherlands was increasingly difficult, and she dared not alienate men of such importance as the three that were before her now--the brilliant Egmont, victor of Gravelines and St. Quentin; Hoorne, Admiral of Flanders; and Orange, the most powerful of the Princes and Stadtholders in the States.

She sat now erect and a little drawn back against the burnished leather of her seat, rather in the attitude of one at bay. Her presence was majestic and graceful, with something of the commanding fascination which had made her father so popular; but the Flemish blood of her commoner mother told too--she lacked refinement and softness; her features were bold and haughty, her brow heavy, her upper lip shaded with dark hair; her hands were large and strong, and seemed ill-adapted for the embroidery they now held; indeed, her most notable accomplishment was horsemanship, as it had been that of her aunt, the former Regent, Mary of Hungary.

Her attire of gold brocade and black velvet, stiff cap and flowing veil of black tissue folded over her shoulders, was more rich than tasteful; she wore no jewellery nor adornments, for she affected a masculine strength of character and disdain of detail.

Her needle went in and out of the embroidery; but the work was largely a pretence, and the flower she was making was stitched false, for her full brown eyes were continually glancing from one to the

other of the three before her. Count Hoorne was speaking; in words slow but full of intense feeling he was putting before her the nobles' case against the Cardinal.

The Admiral stood by the pointed window on which gleamed the arms of Brabant in the leaded glass a grave and gloomy figure, dark and careless in attire, with a haughty and rather sad face, brooding eyes, a discontented brow, and black fan-shaped beard.

Standing behind him, leaning against a side table covered with a small cloth of Persia, was Lamoral Egmont, the famous soldier, the popular grandee, Knight of the Golden Fleece, Stadtholder of Brabant and Artois.

Half his exceptional popularity he owed to his unusual good looks, his beautiful head with the brown curls carried so splendidly, his soldier's figure tall and strong, his noble port, the brilliancy of his attire. His silk and brocades, jewels and gold, showed the more gorgeous now in contrast with Hoorne.

Leaning against the wall near him was the Prince of Orange; he had a quiet air, and his head was bent forward on his ruff. He was not so magnificent as Egmont, though his appointments were very splendid.

And always Margaret's eyes were flashing up covertly from her sewing and measuring the sombre proud speaker, the gorgeous grandee behind him, and that third figure with the bent head.

Hoorne finished at length, bowed to the Regent, and looked at his colleagues.

"You bring very vague accusations, princely count," said Margaret. Her voice was heavy and she spoke haltingly, for she was at ease with no language save Italian. "It would seem that there is nothing

against the Cardinal but private spites and malices."

"There is against him," replied Lamoral Egmont, "that he usurps our place in the Council, as we have endeavoured to show Your Royal Grace."

The embroidery trembled in Margaret's fingers. "You blame him for much that he has not done," she said "as, the bishoprics."

"Do you tell us," cried Hoorne impetuously, "that the Cardinal did not urge these bishoprics at Rome?"

"Nay," replied the Duchess. "They were intended in the Emperor's time--before I, or the Cardinal, came to the Netherlands."

"At least he enforces them and enjoys the finest," persisted Hoorne, unconvinced.

Margaret lifted her bold eyes; they were angry eyes now.

"He enforces them," she said, "because it is His Majesty's wish, and the Cardinal is loyal--I would all were as he! And why are these bishoprics so odious? Methinks they should be comforting to good Catholics"--she darted a sharp glance at the Prince of Orange--"since they are designed to strengthen the ancient faith and rout out heresy."

"They are designed to support and spread the Inquisition," replied Hoorne bluntly, "and that is a thing odious to these States."

"The Spanish Inquisition shall not be introduced," answered Margaret. "That has been promised."

"There is no need to introduce it," said the Admiral dryly. "The Inquisition of the Netherlands is more severe."

"The people will not take it, indeed they will not," said the Stadtholder of Brabant earnestly. "As witness the disturbances, riots, and revolts at Titelmann's executions."

"We are not talking of the people," replied the Regent, with bitter vexation, "nor of their grievances, but of the great lords who foster all this sedition, and seem to have a marvellous sympathy for heretics."

"We have a marvellous respect for the charters and privileges of the States which are in our keeping," said the Prince of Orange, "and which the Inquisition utterly defies and overrules."

Tears of vexation sprang into Margaret's eyes; more than either of the other two was this Prince vexatious to her.

"Ah, Prince," she said, "we know your dispositions. You hide yourself behind the States, behind charters and privileges; but, as my brother said in the matter of the Spanish troops, it is not the States, but you--and I perceive it, never believe but that I perceive it."

William very slightly smiled.

"I have never failed in duty to the King," he replied, "nor loyalty to the Church. And in protesting against the Cardinal and his measures, I do believe, Madame, that I serve the best interests of both."

"It is well," said Margaret bitterly, "for you to speak of loyalty to the Church when your palace shelters heretics and you have a Lutheran wife."

"I had His Majesty's consent to my marriage," said William quietly.

"A reluctant one," returned the Regent, "and His Majesty is still not pleased that you should choose the daughter of the Elector Maurice

but that is past," she added sharply, then, with a thrust at the daughter of the man who had humiliated her father, "though we think the match still imprudent, and marvel at it more than formerly."

William received this reference to his wife with courteous indifference, and Margaret continued with raised voice, the deep colour mounting to her hard face and the embroidery lying forgotten on her lap.

"Methinks it would be more dutiful and fitting if you offered to help me with your advices and influences instead of filling my ears with complaints of the only man who is useful to me."

Lamoral Egmont drew his magnificent person erect.

"We have no opportunity of aiding Your Grace," he said, "since we have been excluded so long from your Councils."

Margaret trembled with anger.

"What do you want of me?" she asked, driven to desperation.

That was too complex a matter for either the Prince of Orange or Count Hoorne to commit themselves to, but Lamoral Egmont, who was neither cautious nor wise, answered instantly--

"The withdrawal of Cardinal Granvelle from the Netherlands."

The Duchess rose in her agitation, sweeping her needlework to the ground.

"Ho, you ask no little thing of me!" she cried in her indignation. "How think you the King would take that request?"

"Let Your Grace make it," replied the Stadtholder of Brabant, with a

touch of insolence. "And, while we wait an answer from Madrid, let Your Grace counsel the Cardinal to comport himself with less overbearing arrogance."

"Arrogance!" flashed Margaret. "What of the Count Brederode, who nightly, when in drink, sports Cardinal's attire at some public mask, and mocks and flouts His Eminence with huge indecency? What of the pasquils that reach my very closet and are thrust under the Cardinal's pillow? What of these vile rhetoric plays which no punishment can stop and which jeer at all holy things?"

"We know none of any of this," declared Hoorne, with rising anger.

"Henry Brederode is not my charge," said Egmont, "nor do I control his frolics."

Margaret stopped short before him.

"What of the fox-tails in your own cap?" she asked. "You wear them openly in the street. Do you think that I do not know of these things?"

The Prince of Orange here interposed.

"If the bishoprics and the Inquisition, the ancient placards and edicts, are to be forced on the people, there is no chance of the States passing the new taxes."

These words instantly brought the Regent to the practical part of the matter, and affected her more than any of the proud speeches of Egmont and Hoorne. The finances of the Netherlands were in a miserable condition. Philip was always demanding money, being continually embarrassed himself, and Margaret feared for her prestige, if not for her position, if she could not supply it; and cordially as she agreed with her brother's proposal to exterminate all heresy in his dominions, and greatly as she admired Granvelle's plans to

carry the Royal wishes into effect, she was shrewd enough to see that the Prince had pointed out a real difficulty, and one that she had lately been acutely conscious of.

At the same time, she disliked the Prince bitterly for calling her attention to this stumbling-block.

"Do you threaten disobedience rebellion?" she asked.

"I threaten nothing," replied William, looking at her calmly. "I speak of what I know of the States. The Stadtholders will not enforce the Inquisition, the people will not submit to it. Rebellion? Who knows? The provinces have revolted before, Madame, against the House of Hapsburg."

Margaret was silent, her eyes narrowed with anger. Her sincere convictions were with the Cardinal. As an ardent Catholic, she loathed the heretics; as a grateful subject of her brother, she wished to obey his wishes. She was loyal, industrious, and ambitious to render a good account of her charge. She believed the men before her, and those whom they represented, to be greedy, jealous self-seekers, and she despised them as mere worldly courtiers; but to the Prince of Orange's argument she was obliged to listen. She was shrewd enough to see that these men knew the Netherlanders as neither she, Philip, nor Granvelle did; and she respected the abilities of the Prince of Orange.

She stood eyeing them all; her hand on her hip, her head well up.

"We cannot obey His Majesty in both things," continued William. "We cannot enforce the edicts and raise the revenues."

Margaret knew this to be so true that she controlled her choler, though her eyes were bright with anger.

"The placards will not be enforced," she replied. "His Majesty waits the decision of the Council of Trent--if that allow a certain latitude to heretics, His Majesty will obey."

"If not?" asked William.

The Duchess flung out her hands with a gesture of annoyance and desperation.

"How do I know what the King will do? I am here to execute his orders. I can but ask that the Inquisitors deal gently until some decision is known."

The three grandees took this as a concession, almost a confession of defeat on the part of Margaret, as it indeed was; nothing but a deep sense of the difficulties and perils of her position could have wrung such words from her.

"And Your Grace will advise moderation to the Cardinal?" asked William, taking up his hat.

"Do that errand yourself, noble Prince, since you are responsible," replied the Regent keenly.

William unexpectedly laughed, and turned his charming face with a gay look of amusement towards the angry lady.

"Truly I will," he said. "His Eminence and I used to know each other well, and I cannot think that old friendship worn so thin that he would refuse me an hour's hospitality at La Fontaine."

Margaret saw that she had been betrayed into an imprudence.

"Do what you will," she said, "but on your own authority."

"Your Grace is vexed," remarked Hoorne, "but we have done nothing but our plain duty."

"God grant Your Grace may come to see it so," added the courteous Egmont.

"And may He set great prudence and clemency in your heart, Madame," said the Prince, still smiling, "for we stand on the edge of chance, and may easily mistread."

Margaret dismissed them as haughtily as she dared, and as soon as they had gone sat down to write an agitated letter to Philip, full of the obstinacy of the Netherlands, the insolence of the grandees, the impossibility of obtaining money, and the virtues of the much-abused Cardinal.

The three grandees mounted and rode along the city heights where their homes lay among pleasant parks and beautiful gardens; as they ascended the steep, winding streets they could look back at the town lying in the hollow, ornate and gorgeous, proud and serene beneath them.

The twin towers of Saint Gudule rose majestically from above the clustered house roofs, below them soared the immense spire of the Town Hall, and in the blue cloudiness and golden light of the late summer afternoon dozens of gilt weathercocks swung in the gentle breeze and glittered in the sun, and in and out of the crevices of the gables flashed the white wings of innumerable pigeons.

The Prince of Orange glanced often at this prospect of the fair town; but Lamoral Egmont's eyes were for the bending knee and lowered head of passers-by, the curtsies of women spinning at the doors, the bright eyes of maidens peeping with admiration from behind the chequered casement blinds; and the Admiral's gaze was straight

before him, as if he saw nothing.

"Think you the Regent meant what she said?" he asked at length.

"I think she was frightened," said the Stadtholder of Brabant.

"She is not a clever woman," remarked the Prince of Orange. He turned his head stiffly in the great ruff and smiled at Hoorne. "I think she will render an ill account of her charge. She grows more confused every day."

"Why did His Majesty send a woman at all?" complained Hoorne fiercely.

"Because he wanted one not too strong," replied William. "It were wise to endeavour to restrain Brederode," he added. "His jests against the Cardinal are very daring, and may involve us all."

"Who is to argue with Brederode?" asked Egmont. "He and De la Marck are beyond all reason; and if their jests vex Granvelle, I am not the man to stop them."

"Granvelle smiles at jests; there are better ways to discomfit him than the drunken frolics of Brederode," returned William.

The conversation ceased, for they had entered a narrow street where their voices could easily be heard. Their talk turned on falconry.

"I wish I could get away for a while," said William. "The Elector gave me the prettiest hunting dog, as white as snow, and I would very willingly try him in the campaign. If I am to be ruined by the falconers, I would use them!" he laughed.

"Heir Jesus! how they cost!" sighed Lamoral Egmont, who was even deeper in debt than the Prince. "Never were the ducats so hard to

come by, never were they so much needed."

"Granvelle has the ducats," broke out Hoorne, regardless of prudence. "The abbeys, benefices, and plunder that have come his way would set us all at ease."

And the Admiral's swarthy face darkened with wrath and jealousy; indeed, Granvelle's persistent greed, and the lavish manner in which Philip satisfied it, was the chief reason of the hatred in which the nobles held the Cardinal, as his supposed patronage of the bishoprics and the Inquisition was the chief reason for the hatred of the people.

William lifted his brows and smiled meaningly; Lamoral Egmont shrugged his shoulders as if he could not bear to consider the subject.

And so they went their way slowly, their equipments shining in the sun. The children ran to the doors to look after them, and the women whispered, "There go the two Stadtholders and the Admiral! Look what splendid princes they are!"

IX - CARDINAL GRANVELLE

Anthony Perrenot, Archbishop of Mechlin, Cardinal Granvelle, chief adviser to the Regent and the chief reliance of Philip in the Netherlands, as he was the chief object of the detestation of the Netherlanders, grandees and people alike, spent most of his time in his beautiful country house outside the gates of Brussels, surrounded by all that elegant luxury and worldly extravagance which particularly aroused the wrath of his enemies.

His position with the King his master was as secure as any man's could be with Philip, and he flattered himself that he had an influence

not easily shaken over the mind of the Regent, who was by no means the strong and masculine character she appeared, but one easily influenced, as Philip well knew when he sent her to the Netherlands with Granvelle to stand behind her chair and pull the strings of government over her shoulder; he had also some supporters among the nobles, notably the Duke of Aerschot, Barlaymont, and Viglius.

For the rest, he stood alone in an atmosphere of hatred, contempt, and insult, even perhaps peril, for he believed that he was in constant danger of assassination. But the Burgundian priest preserved his serene calm, for he was absolutely fearless, sincerely loyal to his master and his Church, and intensely ambitious; and courage, loyalty, and ambition combined to hold him steadfastly in the place to which all three had called him and now kept him.

On this day of the hot waning autumn he finished his usual voluminous dispatch to Philip with particular pleasure, for he had been able to give his master definite news of the misdeeds of his enemies, against whom he had been cunningly and gently insinuating complaints for some while past.

That morning Barlaymont had come to him with the information that he had been approached to join a league of the grandees, the sole object of which was to force the recall or retirement of the Cardinal. Barlaymont had not only refused to join, but had instantly disclosed all he knew to Granvelle, who thus had been enabled to inform his master that the chiefs of this league were Orange, Hoorne, and Egmont, and that all the nobles had joined them with the exception of Aerschot, Aremberg, and Meghem.

Barlaymont's information had not come as a surprise to Granvelle; he knew perfectly well that the grandees were working by intrigue and open opposition for his downfall, but he was glad that they had committed themselves by this league, and pleased that Barlaymont

had proved so faithful a tool.

He added to his letter a complaint of the way in which the Marquis of Berghen, Stadtholder of Hainault, Valenciennes, and Cambray, and Hoorne's brother, Baron of Montigny, Stadtholder of Tournay, refused to carry out the decrees of the Inquisition in their several provinces. He advised His Majesty to add these two names Berghen and Montigny to those of Orange, Egmont, and Hoorne as dangerous men.

He also added that Viglius, though his loyalty was unquestioned, was becoming frightened at the storm raised in the Netherlands by the Inquisition and the rumour that the late Emperor's edicts against heretics were to be enforced, and was counselling moderation.

The Minister then sealed up his letter and went out into his exquisite gardens, where, in consequence of the continued great heat, his dinner was laid on a marble table of beautiful Greek workmanship which stood beneath a chestnut tree now covered with tawny and golden foliage. To-day the Cardinal took his midday meal alone; the great nobles had long since ceased to accept his hospitality, and he was not always in the mood to entertain those of the lesser sort who still cared to come.

His keen, intelligent mind, highly accomplished and learned, did not disdain its own company; he found the cultured man's pleasure in a luxurious solitude.

Seating himself in the gilt chair, softly cushioned in red, set for him, he glanced with pleasure at the cool white table flecked with sunshine and the shadows of the great chestnut leaves, at the crystal bottles of amber and ruby-coloured wine, at the curious twisted glasses stained with opal hues like a foam bubble, the gold service with jade handles, the plates and dishes of porcelain as fine and

glossy as an egg-shell, the napkin of Brussels lace rich with a design of lilies, the honey-coloured loaves lying in their snowy linen, the fruit reposing on ice in the delicate silver basket. The Cardinal was never wearied in his refined enjoyment of the elegancies of life.

As he sat over his luxurious repast admiring the mellow light of the garden and the way his Grecian fauns and dancers showed their marble limbs among the exotic shrubs of laurel, myrtle, citron, and bay, his secretary came across the grass with a paper in his hand.

"Another pasquil?" smiled the Cardinal.

"A fellow passing, Eminence," replied the priest, "found this thrust into the bars of the gate."

"Give him a piece of money," returned the Cardinal carelessly, "and pray that the hand that put it there be not the same as took it down."

"Shall I leave it?" asked the secretary. "It is, as usual, very foolish."

"Leave it," replied his master. "You know I make a collection of them."

The priest's dark figure returned through the sunshine, and Granvelle sipped his wine, bright as a diluted jewel in the opal clouded glass, while his serene eyes rested on the sheet of coarse paper roughly printed with picture and verses in smeared black.

Presently he set down the wine and took up the paper delicately in his fine, capable fingers. It contained a hideous caricature of himself in the likeness of a hen seated on a nest of eggs, each of which was labelled with the name of one of the new dioceses; the shells of several were already broken, and newly fledged bishops were hopping out of them.

Granvelle was well used to such jests; the Netherlands were famous for their pasquils, their pamphlets, their medals, and their rhetoric plays, and Granvelle had been the butt of all in turn; not even the terrors of the dreaded Inquisition itself could restrain the sharp and lively wits of the people from ridiculing their enemy.

Often enough they hit him on the raw, sometimes too they went wide of the mark, as in the coarse pasquil he held now; for, despite the general opinion to the contrary, the Cardinal was not responsible for the creation of the new bishoprics. He remained leaning back on his silk cushions gazing musingly at the caricature; the sense of some one approaching caused him to look up. Even his perfect control could scarcely repress a start; the Prince of Orange was coming across the grass. William made his salutation with smiling apology for his intrusion. The Cardinal dismissed the half-doubtful secretary, who was behind the Prince, and motioned his guest to the seat opposite his own.

"I come without permission," said William, smiling, "but I felt a great desire for a little speech with Your Eminence."

Granvelle's sumptuously liveried attendants were bringing the Prince cushions, a footstool, and setting before him wine, cakes, and fruit.

Granvelle, with a laugh, flicked the pasquil on to the marble table.

"The people become extraordinarily daring," he remarked, accepting the Prince's presence as if it was the usual thing for him to behold his arch-enemy at his table. "There is a general defiance, a lawlessness abroad, very displeasing to the servants of His Majesty."

William leant back in his chair; he was still smiling; his graceful, youthful figure, his small handsome head, his rich attire of black velvet with rose-coloured points—all gave him the appearance of the

useless grandee many believed him to be. But Granvelle was not so deceived; he knew that the young cavalier smiling at him was as astute, as experienced, as able, as wise, as prudent as himself, and that he was the most dangerous of the many dangerous men in the Netherlands.

"There is much abroad displeasing to the servants of His Majesty," he answered. "I think there are perilous times ahead."

"If the grandees persist in what is near disloyalty, yes," admitted Granvelle, and he too smiled.

"Disloyalty?" said William lightly, and raising his fine brows. "It is a matter of terms. Our remonstrances have been given to the Regent out of regard to our loyalty."

"I know something of your regards, Highness," replied the Cardinal, thinking of the information he had received that morning.

William instantly took his meaning.

"Had we not wished Your Eminence to know of our proceedings, we should scarcely have disclosed them to Baron Barlaymont."

The Cardinal's fine face hardened; he set down the peach he was handling, and took his chin in his fingers. In the young grandee's manner was a hint of that insolence the Burgundian priest had had to endure from the lesser nobles like Brederode and De la Marck--the insolence of the great towards the upstart who had been born a commoner.

"Your Eminence," continued William delicately, "would be wise to retire from the Netherlands."

"You came to tell me that?" asked Granvelle, almost surprised into

anger.

"The Netherlands will not endure the measures of Your Eminence."

"Then they are rebels against the King's authority," replied the Cardinal proudly, "for I do nothing of myself, but all as the instrument of Madrid; and now we are speaking with this boldness, I tell you, *in the name of King Philip*, to warn your friends Montigny and Berghen to be more obedient to the commands of the Inquisition in their provinces."

William looked at the Cardinal.

"The King promised not to introduce the Inquisition," he said.

"I am not the keeper of the King's conscience," replied the Cardinal adroitly, "but I can bear witness that His Majesty is introducing nothing--the Inquisition was in the Netherlands in the Emperor's time."

"But it was never enforced," replied the Prince, "and in many provinces unknown, so that there are whole villages, nay, townships, of those of the Reformed Faith."

"What is the *Reformed Faith* or the Netherlands to *you*?" asked Granvelle keenly--"you, a Provencal prince, a German count, a Spanish grandee, a Catholic?"

"As to that," replied the Prince lightly, "I am Stadtholder of some Netherland provinces, and one of the advisers to the Regent, therefore I think I do well to protest against measures which I foresee bringing rain on His Majesty's dominions--and I do not believe in punishing people for their private faith."

"That sentiment would be a dangerous one were you a common

man," returned the Cardinal.

"I know," smiled William, "and it is against such things that I protest."

"Tolerance for heretics is only to be expected from a Prince united so closely to them."

"Perhaps," said William indifferently; "but I was not talking of my tolerance, but of Your Eminence's policy."

"That is known, clear, and will not be altered," said Granvelle; he raised his glass and slowly sipped his wine.

William leant forward across the marble table set with the mingled luxuries of crystal and silver, and fixed his dark eyes on the churchman's serene face.

"Cardinal Granvelle," he said earnestly, "do you mean to force the Inquisition on the Netherlands?"

"I mean," answered Granvelle, with his habitual evasion, "to fulfil to the letter the commands of His Majesty."

"Whatever they may be?"

"Most certainly--yes."

"Even if the King enforces the Emperor's edicts against heresy?"

"He will not do so until he knows the findings of the Council of Trent."

"But if those are in favour of greater severity against the heretics, and the King endorses them," persisted the Prince, "will you be the instrument to obey His Majesty?"

"I think that Your Highness knows well enough that I shall be that instrument," replied the Cardinal haughtily.

William of Orange drew back; his expression changed to a look of decision that was almost hard, and this unusual sternness of his dark features so altered him that he seemed a different person. For a second Granvelle glimpsed the man behind the mask of the courtier.

"To do what you speak of doing," said William, "is to ruin the Netherlands. The civil officers will not obey, the population will not submit, you will break commerce and industry--you will provoke a revolution."

"I do not fear that," replied Granvelle; "the Stadtholders are not all like Berghen and Montigny--"

"Nor all like Barlaymont. Do you think such a man as he could do anything?" flashed William.

"I am not afraid," smiled the Cardinal, showing to the full that gentle contempt for his adversaries that they had always found so galling. "As for the grandees--"

"As for the grandees," interrupted the Prince steadily, "we are no longer boys or idle courtiers, as perhaps Your Eminence imagines us, but men, able to play a man's game."

Granvelle's smile deepened.

"I never underrated the abilities of Your Highness," he said, "but you perhaps overrate your own power; and for the people--"

"The people! It is they will decide the final issue. They are not slaves, Your Eminence, nor a conquered race, but His Majesty's subjects through inheritance; nor is he an absolute King here, as in Spain, but

merely Count and Lord, and bound by oath to protect the people's charters as they to obey him. Look back a little did not Maximilian do penance in the square of Bruges, and Mary go on her knees to her own councillors? These Netherlander are easily pressed too far."

"Your Highness threatens revolt?"

"I threaten nothing. I prophesy."

The Cardinal tossed down his lace napkin.

"Even if there were a revolt," he said quietly, "it might be crushed."

"It might be supported," replied William.

"By the House of Nassau?" asked Granvelle.

William laughed in the priest's face.

"I am Catholic, and His Majesty's subject," he replied, "but there are certain neighbours who are neither who might easily be induced to foment discontent in the Netherlands."

"Notably the relatives of Your Highness's wife?" insinuated the Cardinal.

"Nay, they are peaceful in Saxony," said the Prince serenely. "I was thinking of the Elector Palatine."

Granvelle made a dignified movement with his hand as if he swept aside all the other's arguments.

"His Majesty is not to be frightened by either rebellious people, jealous nobles, nor the heretic Princes of Germany from proceeding in his duty to God and his subjects. Nay, I am so persuaded of the

fervency of the King for the Holy Church that I believe he could sacrifice the Netherlands, and every soul within them, sooner than allow them to become the breeding-ground of heresy."

"And in this you would support him?" asked William gravely.

"With all my power," replied the Cardinal, "and at peril of my life."

"You are a poor politician then," said the Prince. "I am a good churchman," returned Granvelle calmly, "and that is all I ever made pretence to be."

"So His Majesty, you think, would sooner ruin the Netherlands than suffer them to become heretical?" remarked the Prince.

"I do believe it, and in that resolve the Duke of Alva does support him--and myself."

William rose.

"Then we who have estates in this country must look to them, lest we be ruined too," he said, with a little smile.

"Your Highness will pursue one way, I another," replied the Cardinal, rising also.

"And both of us will be serving His Majesty," remarked William gravely.

The Cardinal gave him a sidelong look, but the Prince's face was impassive.

"That His Majesty must decide," was the priest's answer. Ever courteous, he now conducted his guest to the gate where his horse and squire waited.

They passed the famous statue inscribed "Durate," a woman with an empty wine-glass in one hand and a full glass of water in the other, by which the Cardinal sought to symbolize the resistance of his own calm fortitude and temperance as opposed to the extravagance and worldliness of his enemies.

He called the Prince's attention to this figure.

"'Durate,' my motto," he remarked, with a meaning smile.

"A brave word," replied William. "I too have a high, aspiring motto." He looked straightly at the priest. "Ce sera Nassau, moi, je maintiendrai." With that he mounted and rode back to Brussels, while Granvelle returned thoughtfully across his smooth lawns to his marble table under the chestnut tree. There, leaning back in the pleasant shade, he threw crumbs of bread to the peacocks that came strutting across the grass at his call.

X - THE RHETORIC PLAY

The months passed with terrible monotony for Rénée le Meung and perhaps for all at the Court of Brussels; the long and bitter struggle between the grandees and the Cardinal filled the air with intrigue and dissension; the Regent began to hesitate in her allegiance to Granvelle, and hung miserably undecided between the two parties; Montigny had been sent to Madrid to remonstrate with Philip, but without avail; a second letter of protest was sent, equally fruitless; the Cardinal, serene as always, triumphed quietly over his enemies and continued to be the predominant influence in the Councils of Margaret; heretics continued to be seized and slaughtered wherever the civil authorities could be induced to support the Inquisitors, and the raging discontent of the people was repressed with a heavy hand.

In the sumptuous household of William of Orange life went with the old magnificence but not with the old joyousness; politically it was the rallying-point of the grandees, who had now refused to sit in the councils with the Cardinal, and met in William's gorgeous saloons to discuss their plans; it was also the headquarters of the Prince's brothers, sisters, and brothers-in-law. During the year after his marriage, too, his German relatives visited him there, causing great offence to the Cardinalists; but all these comings and goings, all these intrigues, meetings, entertainments, were clouded by two things: the growing embarrassment of the Prince's finances, and the element of bitter discord provided by Anne of Saxony.

Whatever the festivities or excitements might be, Rénée saw none of them; she was for ever closeted with her mistress, who, now the Prince's quarrel with Granvelle made her appearance at Court impossible, sulked week after week in her rooms. She had taken a capricious liking to have Rénée, and Rénée only, with her; and the waiting-woman submitted to the slavery of her position with a curious dumb patience.

There was no distraction, no change, no interest in Anne's life. Her first child she had lost at birth, and this had further embittered her; her one time extravagant love for her husband, her pleasure in fine clothes and jewels, were completely dead; she never appeared but she created a disturbance with her temper; she refused to admit any of the court ladies into her intimacy, and so she remained closed within her rooms, a slattern, a shrew, a scold, and daily becoming worse; entirely indifferent to the great events taking place at her very gates, but keenly alive to any detail in which she might find excuse for complaint or fury.

Rénée wondered why she stayed; the life was almost intolerable, and she had had two chances of escape since she came to

Brussels: one of the Regent's secretaries had asked her in marriage, and the Countess of Egmont was willing to take her into her service.

But Rénée had declined both, and remained in the great Nassau palace, tending her mistress with tireless devotion and eagerly watching what news she could of the movement of the events in which she perceived the Prince of Orange was the leader; she was like one waiting—but for what she did not know. It was in the winter after the grandees had dispatched their second letter to Philip, and when affairs seemed to be reaching a crisis in the Netherlands, that matters in the Nassau household reached a climax of discord.

Anne had taken a whim to have the Prince's children by his first marriage under her care, and had been fiercely angered by William's decision to place his little girl in the household of the Regent, and to keep the boy in Louvain. As a result of this Anne kept her room for nearly a week; but the day came when the Prince, entertaining his friends at one of his lavish dinners, demanded her presence as necessary.

It was, as usual, Rénée's task, first to persuade her mistress to appear, and secondly to make her fit to take the head of the Prince's table, and, as the short afternoon began to fail, Rénée went in search of her; she found Anne in her bedchamber hunched up against the white porcelain stove; she was eating sweets.

Rénée, whose natural instincts were towards the beautiful, the refined, even the voluptuous, never came into her mistress's presence without a sense of absolute repulsion.

Anne, though still under twenty, was now as careless in her dress and person as any hag of ninety; increased ill health had deadened her always dull complexion, her eyes were swollen beneath, her

mouth loose and ragged; her colourless hair was gathered untidily in her neck, her twisted figure further bent.

To-day she wore a bedgown of stained dark blue velvet, trodden-over slippers, and a soiled linen cap; yet she cost the Prince more in clothes than ever the charming and elegant Anne of Egmont had done.

Though it was not yet dark, the windows were tightly closed and curtained, and candles flared and guttered untidily on the various tables. The Princess had sat all day in this artificial light, and the atmosphere of the chamber was thick and close. As Rénée entered Anne looked up.

"You were out yesterday," she said, breaking the utter silence she had preserved for two days.

"Yes, Highness, it was my hour."

"Where did you go?"

"About the town, as always."

"I saw you in the Gardens with Count Louis," sneered Anne.

"I met him," replied Rénée, unmoved. "We spoke together for, I think, two minutes."

"Why were you so late?"

"There was a rhetoric play, Highness, and I was hindered by the crowd."

"What is a rhetoric play?"

"A morality, Highness," replied Rénée patiently, "that the poor oppressed heretics make to expose their wrongs and strike at their tyrants."

"Ah, plays that make a Jest of monks and nuns and all those in authority!"

"It is a grave jest," said Rénée. "They do it at peril of their lives."

"Are they not often apprehended?" asked Anne spitefully.

"Very often, Highness, and then they are strangled or burnt or tortured, or hacked to death with a rusty sword, as a poor schoolmaster was the other day for reading the Bible to his wife. And it was in her presence they slew him, and she died of it," added Rénée quietly.

"And they still persist?"

"Ay, they still persist," repeated Rénée.

"I wish you would keep away from them," said the Princess. "Do you want to involve me in this unruliness?"

Rénée smiled.

"There is no fear of that," she replied; "and if they are bold enough to perform, I am bold enough to be of the audience, Highness."

"Do not come to *me*, if you are taken," said Anne.

"I shall come to no one. I am not afraid to die as the others do, when the time comes," replied Rénée, laying out and making ready Anne's garments for the evening.

"What do you mean by 'when the time comes'?" demanded Anne.

Rénée very faintly blushed.

"I mean that perhaps there may be some use for me--something for me to do." She changed the subject by adding: "And now it is time that Your Highness made ready for the supper."

"Why should I go at his bidding?" cried Anne stormily. "Why does he ask me to come? Merely to slight me before these others, these rebellious Netherlanders he gathers about him. God, what a life!" Her eyes sparkled wildly, she clasped her hands on her knees and rocked herself to and fro. "I had better have stayed in Saxony. I was better treated there, more taken notice of here I am nothing in my own household! What does he care? He spends his time with other women, I will warrant."

"His Highness spends his time in affairs, Madame, and laborious business, and gives all his leisure to you," said Renée.

"Affairs, business!" sneered Anne. "What do you know of it? He will not attend Court because of this foolish quarrel with the Cardinal; and as for his own matters, if he attended to them he would not be in the confusion and debt he is, with mortgages and money from the Jews. Where does his fortune go?" she added, working herself up. "I was a well-dowered maiden, but what I brought him was like water thrown down a well. What have I seen of it? His idle brothers and his mincing sisters bleed him, I will swear."

Her glance fell on the dress Renée had put out, and her mood changed.

"Perhaps he is hoping that I shall not come down and that he can roister alone with his worthless friends, but I will disappoint him."

This idea seemed to give her pleasure, and she suffered two of her tirewomen to array her in a gold and scarlet brocade she was fond of, a wide ruff of Mechlin lace, and a violet mantle with silver tissue. As she sat with an unusual patience under the hands of the little German girl who was crimping her hair with hot irons, she asked the reason of all the grey camlet liveries she had observed from her window.

"I note that many of the great lords' men wear them," she added.

"Oh, Madame," said the little maid, Katrine, glad that her mistress was so quiet, "it is because of a dinner given the other day by the Seigneur de Groblendonck, where the talk fell on the extravagance of the Cardinal, and the great splendour of his liveries; and it was agreed, to spite him, that the grandees' men should all wear a plain livery, grey camlet, as Your Highness saw it."

"A pack of fools!" said Anne. "And was there no protest?"

"They say the first device on the sleeve was changed from a Cardinal's hat to a bundle of arrows, at the Regent's request; and she would have stopped the liveries, but there were too many ordered and cut. It was the Count of Egmont who thought of the design."

"He is a big fool," said Anne shrewdly. "Does he think the King will ever forgive that? Who else was at this dinner?"

"The Seigneur Montigny and Seigneur Berghen and others, Highness."

"Silly child's jests!" cried the Princess. "Where did you hear all this?"

"Oh, Madame, one cannot stir without hearing it; the town is full of the

talk of it. If Your Highness had not been indisposed," she added tactfully, "you too would have heard of this dinner and the liveries."

Anne turned to Rénée.

"Why did you not tell me of this?" she demanded. "It is much more interesting than your rhetoric plays."

"The rhetoric play! I saw that!" cried little Katrine. "I was with Rénée--it was so amusing. There was a fellow with chalk on his face made up like the Cardinal and some one called out to arrest him; but the people only laughed, and when one of the town guard came up there was the Seigneur Brederode standing by the stage with his sword half out and offering to spit anyone who touched the players. And the guard made off, buffeted by the crowd, who cheered my Lord Brederode finely--"

"You talk too much," said Anne crossly, "and you have done my hair ill."

She rose, fiercely pushing away the combs and brushes that cumbered her dressing-table, and limped to the door, a tragic enough figure in her ravaged and useless youth.

It was Rénée's duty to attend her to the dining-room, for it pleased Anne to have a lady behind her chair as if she was an Empress, and many and many a weary hour had the waiting-woman spent observing the sulks, violences, and rudenesses of Anne, and the unfailing gentleness of the Prince--a gentleness which, however, was becoming rather stern of late.

To-night Anne received her guests with passable civility. The brilliant saloon, the splendid dresses, the music, the honour paid her, seemed to raise her spirits; but the effect was only temporary. Half-

way through the meal she fell into sullenness; she clouted the ears of the page who brought her napkin, and then, because he spilt some drops of water on her gown, she screamed out for the music to cease, saying the sound of it was tearing her head in two; she abused the cooking, then sank into silence, emptying glass after glass of wine.

Rénée had noticed that the Princess drank far too much of late; with the excuse of her headaches she always had wine in her apartments, and the quantity of this she consumed had considerably increased.

And to-night the Prince observed it for himself; for he moved his wife's glass away, and the steward, understanding, brought no more wine to Her Highness. Anne noticed this, and her eyes flamed with rage; she dragged nervously at the tablecloth and pulled at her mouth. Rénée shuddered; she was somehow desperately desirous that Anne should not shame the Prince.

But the waiting-woman was powerless; she could only stand there silent, a mere unnoticed spectator. It was a brilliant company: Egmont was there with his wife, Hoorne, Mansfeld, Montigny, Berghen, Brederode, and other of the grandees and lesser nobles and their wives now all openly banded against the Cardinal.

Most of the talk turned on the famous new liveries, and Egmont described how he won the toss which was to decide the design, and how eagerly his livery had been accepted.

At this point Anne lifted her smouldering eyes and turned to her husband.

"Will our men appear in this beggarly camlet?" she asked, and her tone was a direct insult to Egmont and his fellows.

"Why not?" smiled William. "It will be an easy means of economy, *ma mie*."

"Economy!" repeated Anne scornfully. "That is a strange point on which to begin economy; and is it not rather late, too, now when your affairs stand almost past helping?"

"Her Highness speaks like a Cardinalist," smiled the Countess of Egmont, in the hope of distracting Anne from her temper. "Yet she must have little love for the persecutor of the Protestants."

Anne leant forward, put her arm on the table, and stared rudely at the Countess across the gold and silver, china and porcelain of her own luxurious table.

"I did not come to Brussels, Madame," she said, "to bicker with the Cardinal and flout His Majesty, nay, nor to live cooped away like a sick pigeon within four walls--"

"Anne!" said the Prince, turning in his chair. "Hush, Anne."

The Princess faced him with sudden frenzy.

"I may speak at my own table! I may say what I wish! Do you think that I am Griselda in the silly tale to suck my thumb patiently while you do what you please! By the living God, I would that I was back in Saxony! But little you care--"

"Anne!" cried William. "Oh, Anne!"

"Anne, Anne," she mocked him. "How long is Anne to endure it?"

The Countess of Egmont rose in her place and beckoned to Rénée.

"Her Highness is ill," she said quickly. "It is a shame to expose her."

The Prince caught at the words.

"Yes, you are ill--let them see you to your chamber."

"I am not ill!" cried Anne, with a look of hate at the Countess, "but heart-sick with the treatment I get."

She rose too, glittering in her brocades and dragging the cloth awry.

"So I am to be sent from my own table," her railing continued. She swayed on her feet and burst into hysteric tears; the Prince caught her arm; she turned and struck him feebly with her other hand.

Count Louis rose and clapped his hands, and the musicians began to play, while Rénée and the Prince led Anne from the dining-hall.

As they reached her room the little German girl came running to meet them with a frightened face.

"What is the matter with her?" demanded William sternly, as the sobbing, protesting Princess collapsed, a shaken heap, on a chair.

"She is ill," said Rénée. She could not bear to look at him, so pale he was, so suddenly grave and sad, all look of youth gone from him. Rénée felt personally shamed.

"A strange illness," he replied. "I can but hope that she will improve as she becomes older."

He was turning away when Katrine broke out--

"Your Highness--it is the wine. To-night when I was arranging the room I found these,"--she pointed to a dismal row of empty flasks on a side table,--"and the steward told me he brought them to Madame--"

-and pounds of sugar. It is the wine which makes Her Highness ill."

Rénée shuddered at the girl's boldness in thus unveiling what the waiting-woman had concealed even from herself; but perhaps, she thought desperately, it was as well that the Prince should know.

"Is that it?" exclaimed the Prince; he flushed, and his voice was full of an extraordinary bitterness. He turned and looked at the intoxicated girl in her disarrayed splendour and her imbecile tears. Renée knew as well as if he spoke that he was thinking how dear he had paid for this wedding, which he had so long striven for, and so triumphantly achieved.

Anne struggled up, supporting herself on the arm of the chair.

"I wish you had left me in Saxony," she sobbed foolishly. "What life is this for me?"

"It is not over-sweet for me, Madame," replied the Prince. "But do not think that you can trouble me further. I now know your worth, and can dismiss you from my mind."

She was frightened, half-sobered, for never before had he spoken so coldly to her, and the finality of his tone struck even her dazed brain, and she dimly realized that she had lost him.

"This comes of all these miserable quarrels," she muttered confusedly--"your livery--your rhetoric play--"

"There is no need for a rhetoric play wherewith to mock me," interrupted William. "Your Highness plays a sorrier morality here than any mouthed in the streets."

He left her; he went back to his guests. Renée and Katrine, helped by another frightened woman, got the Princess to bed.

They then sat down, drearily enough, to their supper, and conversed in whispers of Egmont's livery, their mistress, the rhetoric play, and the things, big and small, which went to make their life.

XI - The Jesters And The Rhetoric Players

That winter the Count Adolphus, who had been seeing service with the King of Denmark, joined the Nassau household at Brussels, where Count Louis was already living; he too hoped for some post under his brilliant brother, and meanwhile eagerly joined the party of the grandees and closely associated himself with the band of young and reckless cavaliers, such as Count Louis, Count Hoogstraaten, young Mansfeld, and Henry Brederode.

It was a gorgeous life, an extravagant life, a life in every way reckless and opulent that these seigneurs led on the edge of revolution, on the edge of the King's wrath, on the edge perhaps of worse things than any of them dreamed.

There were hunts, falcon parties, entertainments at their magnificent country seats, balls, feasts, dinners, masks in the great palaces in Brussels; even the Cardinalists Aremberg, Aerschot, and Barlaymont mingled in this joyous and spendthrift society. But it was the party headed by Orange, Egmont, and Hoorne which went the furthest in splendour, display, and open defiance of the Cardinal and the edicts of the Inquisition edicts which two Stadtholders at least, Berghen and Montigny, resolutely refused to enforce in their provinces.

Granvelle smiled and wrote his long dispatches to the King, carefully giving instances of the pride and insolence of the grandees, and declaring that not only were they set against himself, but against the

authority of His Majesty. Margaret raged and wept and grew daily more confused; all had forsaken her council board save the Cardinal and his creatures, and her pride began to revolt against Granvelle's obvious treatment of her as a puppet. Her secretary Armenteros, one of the sly Spaniards bred in the school of Madrid, urged her to assert herself, and she could not but see that Granvelle's policy, however acceptable to the King, was most likely to raise a religious war in the Netherlands, which she, a foreigner in fact, though nominally a Fleming, dared not attempt to coerce without the aid of the Stadtholders with their immense local influence.

Early in the new year it became secretly known to the grandees that Margaret had lately sent a letter to the King representing the desperate financial state of the country, the firm hold heresy had, the immense feeling against the Inquisition, the impossibility of counting on the nobility while Granvelle remained in power, and the advisability of recalling the Cardinal for a while.

This news was received as a triumph, and Egmont, with his usual recklessness, gave a great feast, where the toast "to the departure of the man in red" was enthusiastically drunk.

It was past midnight when a party of young nobles--Adolphus of Nassau, Hoogstraaten, Montigny, and Brederode--left Egmont's mansion and turned homewards through the moonlit streets of Brussels.

They would not so soon have left the festival if they had not been inspired by a project of daring mischief: Brederode had a sheaf of violent pasquils under his brocade cloak, Hoogstraaten in the same manner concealed a pot of paste, and Adolphus and Montigny were to keep watch while the other two placarded their insults over any bare wall that offered.

It was a fair night, and the moonlight fell unclouded into the streets, casting sharp shadows from gables and balconies and rendering the work of the young cavaliers as dangerous as they could wish; even Egmont had warned them against proceeding too far, and William had perpetually forbidden his brothers to indulge in dangerous jests, for William knew Philip.

But they were young, enthusiastic, warmed with wine, absolutely fearless--and where Henry Brederode was there could never be caution.

This nobleman was not wealthy, but of as ancient a descent as any in the Netherlands, being the last representative of the former Counts of Holland, of whose vast possessions, however, he retained only one lordship.

As he stood now leaning against a church door on which he was engaged in pasting his pasquil, it was easy to see the fascination which kept him the friends of men who believed him worthless, for there was a winning charm in the handsome laughing face, the thick curls shading the bold impudent eyes, the humorous mouth, showing the man of ready wit, of endless daring, of quick temper, and ready good nature. He was dressed, altogether beyond his means, in purple and gold brocade; his ruff of Flanders lace was stained with wine, and in the gold silk twist of his left garter he carried a dagger.

Near him stood Anthony Lalaing, Count Hoogstraaten, a chosen friend of the Prince of Orange despite his youth; he was short and very slender, and looked almost like a page as he offered the paste pot, his dark mantle wrapped from his eyes to his knees, his hat pulled over his brow, the only part of his festival attire visible being his rose-coloured silk hose.

Adolphus of Nassau also muffled himself in his cloak, and Floris de

Montmorency, the Seigneur de Montigny, a dark splendid cavalier, kept watch at the turn of the street.

The yellow lights of the two oil lamps, flickering before a gaudy shrine to the Virgin set in the angle of the houses opposite the church, showed that the streets were empty, and that no one spied from the windows, alike all dark and shuttered. But as Brederode, with a laugh of enjoyment, was pasting a crude but effective likeness of the Cardinal rapidly journeying to hell in the company of the Devil next to the lampoon which he had already firmly affixed to the church door, Hoogstraaten and Montigny both gave a sound of warning--but too late; a carriage, singularly light and noiseless, swept round the corner, and the nobles, whose own reckless laughter had concealed the sound of the wheels, found the vehicle on them before they could fly.

One of them, at least, did not wish to do so; Brederode turned round, the paste-brush in his hand, ready for any defiance.

The other three crowded close to the door, hiding with their persons the distinct white squares of the still wet lampoons.

"What carriage in these streets at this hour?" whispered Montigny, who, as the most prudent, was also the most nervous and anxious.

His curiosity was not long in being satisfied, the bunds of the carriage were up, and from the window nearest the church looked out the serene smooth face of Cardinal Granvelle.

Even Brederode concealed the paste-brush, and the others lowered their faces into the folds of their mantles.

But the carriage stopped, and Granvelle looked straight at Brederode.

"Good evening," he said. "You enjoy the night air of Brussels?"

"As well on foot as Your Eminence in a carriage," replied the Baron, throwing back his head, his eyes beginning to dance with defiance.

"Oh, I," replied Granvelle, his glance travelling over the other cavaliers--"I am returning to La Fontaine after supper with the Regent."

"I also am returning home," replied Brederode. "My host was the Count Egmont."

"Did the Count win any more dice throws?" asked the Cardinal.

"Nay, we were not occupied in gaming," said Brederode; "but had we played," he added, with his reckless loyalty to Egmont, "I doubt not the Count would have won."

"Ah, he has luck," smiled the Cardinal, "but he may find the throw of the dice that made him the designer of the liveries a perilous victory."

The three cavaliers drew closer together; for all their high spirits and youthful bravado they knew what power the Cardinal had with Philip, and what the King's wrath meant. There might be eventual death for all of them if Granvelle saw what was pasted on the church door behind them.

But Brederode answered dauntlessly--

"Is there not some peril in Your Eminence driving abroad so late and unattended? Best be on your way; you are not so popular in Brussels."

Granvelle smiled.

"I am well aware that I have enemies capable of assassinating me, but I am able to despise them, even--" his glance again swept the silent three--"if these here are among those willing to lie in wait to do me a mischief."

"Whoever advised you so, lied!" cried Brederode.

The Cardinal leant farther from the window. "Who are those behind you?" he asked. "Methinks I know the figure of the Seigneur Hoogstraaten, or is it some page? And a member of the House of Nassau--would it be now--Adolphus or Louis?"

"Adolphus," answered that knight, who would not involve his brother in his adventure; "and by your leave we have as good right to be abroad as yourself."

"An amorous adventure?" smiled Granvelle. "Yet a church door is a strange rendezvous."

"Your Eminence knows best of that," said Brederode, with utter recklessness. "There are others beside you who know how to reconcile love and the Church."

Granvelle was well-known to be far from saintly, and the thrust caused him to wince. Adolphus caught Brederode's sleeve and besought him to hush.

"How many insolences go unchecked in the Netherlands!" said Granvelle softly. "But the King is not so easily mocked. Your names are all noted in Madrid."

"Go there and remind His Majesty of them," answered Brederode, "and place my name high on the list, and say I sent you there to write it."

Hoogstraaten pulled him back, and Montigny, disdaining to be disguised now his companions were discovered, moved forward, while Adolphus deftly set his back against the placard.

"Your Eminence will take no notice of the Count," he said, "since he is obviously far gone in wine."

"I take no notice of any of you," replied the Cardinal, "and I think you are more drunk with treason than with wine--"

"Treason?" shouted Brederode; "who dares give that word to me?"

And he was hurling himself on the Cardinal, but Hoogstraaten and Adolphus held him back and forced him against the wall; he laughed and broke loose from them, disappearing in the shadows behind the Cardinal's carriage.

"Ah, Floris Montmorency," cried the Cardinal, "is this the place for the Stadtholder of Hainault?"

"I but amuse myself with my companions," replied Montigny, with a smile, though he was deeply conscious of his false position.

"The nobles of the Netherlands choose dangerous amusements," said the Cardinal, "and the Princes of Nassau dangerous company," he added, glancing at Adolphus.

The three nobles, bitterly irritated at the Cardinal's questions and his delay, could hardly restrain their impatience, especially as they suspected that he knew well enough what they were about, and what they concealed behind them on the church door.

"You think I too dare something in reprimanding you?" said Granvelle, "yet I cannot believe that the chivalrous Houses of Nassau, Lalaing, and Montmorency would combine against a defenceless

priest."

"Your Eminence need have no fear of that," replied Montigny, "though we are not among those who have found priests defenceless--nay, very much the opposite."

"The March air," replied Granvelle, "is too keen to give a relish to this banter of wits with boys and roysterers."

"We wish no conversation with Your Eminence," cried Adolphus angrily; "you might have driven on, for us, without a word."

"I am sorry," said the Cardinal, with a keen look at Montigny; "yea, I say again that I am sorry to see the Stadtholder of Hainault in such company."

With this remark, which Adolphus and Hoogstraaten received as an insult and Montigny as a threat, Granvelle signalled to the coachmen and leant back in his seat.

As the carriage drove on up the slope, Montigny looked anxiously for Brederode.

"Where is he? Fled?" Adolphus asked.

But a shout of laughter answered them; the Count was standing at the corner under the shrine and pointing after the Cardinal's carriage.

When the other three cavaliers looked in this direction they could not forbear laughter either. On the back of the carriage in which Granvelle was taking his stately departure was pasted the lampoon and the picture of His Eminence hastening along with the Devil.

While the others had been using their wits, Brederode had used his paste-brush, and to greater effect.

"Par le Cordieu!" cried the Count, "his face will turn yellow when he sees that!"

"But he will guess who did it, my Brederode," said Hoogstraaten, "and what kind of exploit will that show in us?"

"Give me the bills," added Montigny, "here is enough for one night."

Hoogstraaten cast his paste pot over the wall of the garden nearest, and Adolphus was glad to end the perilous jest; the night air, the conversation with the Cardinal, had cleared their minds of the fumes of wine and excitement. It had been a dangerous moment while they stood with their backs against the placards on the church door.

"The news of this may reach Madrid," continued Montigny, endeavouring to disarm Brederode of his brush.

"Madrid is a great way off," returned the turbulent Count.

"But Philip has a long arm," said Montigny; he took the rest of the pasquils from Brederode and thrust them into his own doublet, and cast the brush over the wall after the paste pot.

Brederode was inclined to be angry, till two of them passed an arm in his, and the four of them went up the street, the Count shouting a song loudly enough to bring the solitary watch to the street corner as they went by.

They had almost regained Egmont's palace, where Hoogstraaten and Montigny were lodging, when their progress was suddenly interrupted.

A man stepped from a doorway and stood right across the path of the four nobles. Their first thought was of violence, and all of them

clapped their hands on their swords, but the fellow threw out his hands to show he was defenceless, and then they noticed that he wore the famous livery the camlet robe with the hanging sleeves embroidered with the bunch of arrows.

"There is only one of you with his face uncovered," he said, in a low eager voice, "but he is the Seigneur Brederode--"

"At your service," said the Count; "whose fellow are you?"

"Alas, I am no one's fellow," was the reply; "this livery is but a disguise bought with my last ducats. Titelmann is after me."

"Are you a heretic?" asked Montigny.

"I am nothing at all, but I played the part of the Cardinal in the rhetoric play, and the bonnet maker where I lodged betrayed me to the Inquisition. But the boy of the house warned me, and I crept out and got this habit, and have been in the streets ever since, and if some great noble will not take me into his house, Titelmann will get me at the last."

"I like your humour," said Brederode instantly, "and all enemies of the Cardinal are friends of mine--"

Montigny checked him and turned to the stranger.

"Fellow," he demanded, "is this tale true, or but some ruse? Answer me truthfully. I am the Stadtholder of Hainault."

"Before God it is true," answered the other earnestly. "And I speak in dread of my life, and with no object but to gain protection. Ever since it has been dark I have been creeping from corner to corner, hoping to find some seigneur--"

"Friend," interrupted Brederode, "I could take you if my house was bigger and my debts less. But Egmont," he added, with his usual admiration of that nobleman, "Egmont will give you shelter his house is as full of heretics as Geneva itself."

"Then I will hasten to throw myself on the protection of the noble Count," answered the other gratefully. But Montigny, fearing the recklessness both of Brederode and Egmont, was for seizing this stranger who might be anything that he did not say he was—even one of Granvelle's spies--when Adolphus said, "Surely I know his voice, his look--" he dropped the mantle from his face as he spoke, and gazed keenly at the other, who gave a quick exclamation.

"It is the Count Adolphus of Nassau! Then out of his princely goodness he can vouch for me." So saying, he thrust back the hood of his habit, revealing the smooth keen face, the agate brown eyes, of Duprès, the Elector Augustus's skryer.

"Yes, it is he," said Adolphus, "who predicted a bloody death for all of us. And now you are in fear of death yourself," he added, with a smile; "it is strange that one who can read the future cannot foretell his own perils."

"Alas, noble seigneur," replied Duprès, with his usual mingled impudence and reverence, "the angels became capricious and would not give me any more good advice, and I, growing restless, must needs leave a good master and go on my travels which have brought me here and will lead me no further than the stake unless one of your princely Graces have pity on me. I have seen," he added, with a slight convulsive shudder, "men burning who have beheld angels in the flames and died happy, calling on Christ. But I have always been profane, and am more like to see devils and die blaspheming my God."

"We would deliver no one to death for such an offence as yours," replied Montigny. "And since the Count Adolphus knows you, he will take you to the household of His Highness, where you will be sheltered."

The skryer bent and impulsively kissed the young knight's hand.

"Can he converse with angels?" demanded the Count, who had kept silence so long with difficulty. "If so he may bring them for me--"

"Alas, my magic table is lost," replied Duprès, "and the impression of the mystic seals they went down on board ship, off Havre."

"But you can tell my fortune?" persisted Brederode.

"You will find that in the bottom of a wine cup, may God forgive you!" cried Hoogstraaten, dragging him on.

"Yes, best go home before more befall us," said Montigny, and the four parted Brederode and his two friends back to the mansion of Egmont; and Adolphus, with the skryer humbly behind him, to the Nassau palace.

XII - THE GRANDEES

The huge and lavish household of the Prince of Orange, which included counts and barons, easily afforded shelter to the poor skryer. William listened to his story, gave him a place among his people, and straightway forgot him.

But Duprès, after his late miserable adventures, was sufficiently happy to find himself under this gorgeous patronage; he had his room, his laboratory, his weekly wage, and by means of the devices he had learned from his late master, Vanderlinden, he earned many

an odd ducat from the numberless people who came and went in the mansion of the Prince.

He gained, too, a considerable dole from Anne, who was overjoyed to see him again, and rejoiced at the diversion a visit to his laboratory afforded. He worked on her childish vanity with perfumes, soaps, lotions, cosmetics; and on her idle credulity, by foretelling the future by means of cards and mirrors; and with the ready wit and facile ability which were his stock in trade, he speedily became a favourite with the Princess, who was the only member of the household sufficiently idle to be able to afford him limitless time, patience, and encouragement; for Anne had no friends, and she was not interested in her second child who lived apart with nurses and maids.

While William was becoming more and more absorbed in the task of defeating Granvelle and the policies he stood for, Anne was becoming more and more addicted to her fortune telling, her magic experiments, her wine drinking, and her bouts of fury, which rendered it almost impossible to find any one to wait on her. Only Rénée le Meung remained at her task, patient, impassive, serving her mistress with as much devotion as if she loved her, concealing her faults as much as possible, and doing all in her power to make Anne preserve a reputable appearance before her world. It was a thankless, bitter task, but Rénée performed it with as complete a self-abnegation as any anchorite his daily round of prayers and penances.

Anne had drifted completely from her husband, the passionate affection she had once evinced for him never revived in one single moment of tenderness. His quarrel with Granvelle, which had closed the Regent's Court to her, his absorption in affairs in which she refused to take the slightest interest, and the neglect she fancied she had received from all in Brussels, had produced in Anne a bitter

disappointment from which grew an equally bitter dislike of her husband whom she regarded as the author of these evils.

But William, eminently generous, peace-loving, and used to domestic gentleness and serenity, made more than one attempt to restore amity; Anne's character bewildered and confused him.

Soon after he had received the momentous news that Cardinal Granvelle had requested the Regent's permission to accompany his brother for a few days into Burgundy to visit their mother, and that Egmont's offer to go to Madrid and explain the affairs of the Provinces in person had been declined, and that the King's answer to the petitions of Orange, Egmont, and Hoorne to remove the Cardinal had been a dry and stiff note bidding the three once more take their places at the Regent's table, William summoned a meeting of all the grandees who had leagued with him against the Cardinal.

The Prince was serious that day; he was often serious lately; matters in the Netherlands became daily worse.

The daily sight of the horrible executions of the Inquisition were driving the people to frenzy, the estates and cities were protesting against the abuse of their charters, and Margaret was helpless. She advised moderation, she promised moderation, but she did not enforce it, for Inquisitor Titelmann was daily in her antechamber, and she was as afraid of Peter Titelmann as she was afraid of Granvelle and of Philip.

So the Prince of Orange, looking about him, beheld confusion, tumult, mystery, danger, and blood; the sky was dark, the air heavy with menaces, and to his acute ear an even more deadly sound was discernible--the first low roll of drums beating up for war. The day of the gathering of the grandees, passing through a little cabinet on his way to the chamber where he was to meet them, he unexpectedly

saw his wife, leaning on her side in the window seat, arranging strange Eastern cards in fantastic patterns.

Behind her a glory of coloured glass cast blue and crimson and gold light over the smooth panelled-wood walls of the little room, over the bent figure of the Princess in her trailing, untidy gown of white and black Venetian velvet, and over the crudely coloured and grotesquely pictured faces of the cards she was arranging with such care.

On a stool near her, but out of the stream of light, sat Rénée, her brown dress scarcely distinguishable from the panelling and the shadows, but her fair face, her vivid hair, brilliant above the plain linen of her small ruff.

William paused on seeing the two women. Anne glanced up and then down again without saying a word; Rénée rose and curtsied. The Prince hesitated a moment, then crossed to his wife and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"*Ma mie*," he said gently, "what occupation is this for you?"

"I am telling my fortune," returned Anne, "in the hope that the future may be fairer than the past; I am telling little Anne's fortune, in the hope it may be better than mine."

"Why in this public place?" asked the Prince.

Anne violently threw down the two cards she held and rose.

"Because I am tired of my rooms! I am tired of everything! Why do you interfere in my movements?"

William caught her small, hot, and feeble hand.

"If you would live more in accord with me I could make life sweeter

for you," he said almost wistfully.

She stood sullenly, looking away.

"Listen, Anne," he continued, "it means much to any man who has difficult affairs on his shoulders to know his wife is bearing her part with patience and discretion--"

"Ah, now you are preaching, like my Uncles Augustus and William," cried the Princess fiercely, "and that, princely Highness, is what I would never endure."

She swept all the cards savagely from the window-seat to the floor and turned away; the Prince's anger was checked by the sight of the limp that marred her walk and impeded her haste to be gone from him.

Rénée began picking up the cards; the light fell over her now, glorifying her opulent beauty that neither her plain dress nor her own cold indifference could eclipse.

"Where is the Princess going?" asked William.

"I think she will go to the workshop of her alchemist, as she calls Duprès, the Burgundian whom Your Highness is sheltering."

The Prince looked keenly at this fair woman who might have so easily been brilliant and who was so extraordinarily passive and so unnaturally patient; it was not the first time he had noticed her utter self-effacement.

"Child," he said kindly, "I fear your service is a dull one and your mistress difficult."

"I hope for nothing better, Your Highness," replied Renée quickly.

"You are very pretty to be so meek," smiled William.

The warm colour rushed to the waiting-woman's face; she stood looking down at the gathered cards in her hands.

"Her Highness keeps me out of charity," she said; "my father was slain as a heretic--we lost everything. I am quite friendless, and quite penniless, but for Her Highness."

"I am sorry," replied the Prince gently; "but do not speak of charity--and what you gain is hardly earned. I have marked that. What were your estates?"

She named them.

"They were confiscated by the Inquisition," she added.

William sighed, well knowing that such property was impossible of recovery.

"When you find your husband I will dower you," he said.

Rénée lifted her face; he could not understand the look on it which almost startled him.

"I thank Your Highness," she said. "Shall I now attend the Princess?"

"Yes, keep with her," returned the Prince. He was turning away when he added, "Whom does she meet in this workshop?"

"Very few, Highness; sometimes there is there a certain Rubens, a lawyer, and his wife, who are friends of Duprès."

"That is not company for the Princess of Orange," said the Prince.

He frowned, hesitated; then turned sharply away.

Rénée stood still a moment, the rose colour glowing in her face, then went in search of Anne.

But the Princess was not in Duprès' laboratory; the waiting-woman found her in her room, sunk in the apathy that was the usual result of her fits of passion.

She sullenly bade Rénée leave her alone, and that lady turned away, idleness and the whole afternoon before her. Katrine had already slipped out into the garden to meet some cavalier, the other women each had her own duty or her leisure; there was no company for Rénée. She went out into the beautiful galleries, empty for once, and turned rapidly towards the hall where the Prince was to meet the grandees. It was one of the principal chambers of the mansion, and had a large musician's gallery from which Rénée and the other waiting-women and pages often watched the balls, masques, and feasts going on below.

Rénée now tried the little door leading to the private staircase of the gallery--it was unlocked; the meeting was no secret, and precautions against eavesdroppers had not been taken. With a heart strangely beating,

Rénée mounted the little dark stair and came softly out into the gallery which was shadowed and partly concealed by long crimson brocade curtains stitched and fringed with black.

Sheltered by the heavy folds, the waiting-woman peeped down into the hall glowing from the light of a great fire which flamed up the huge chimney, and sparkling from the winter sunlight pouring through the coloured glass of the high long windows.

On the walls hung tapestries of silk run with gleams of bullion: they represented the story of Medea and Jason.

Against the brilliant background were grouped all the grandees and nobles who were leagued against the Cardinal.

Rénée's glance went eagerly from one to the other. There was Egmont in a camlet doublet with hanging sleeves embroidered with a bunch of arrows, in imitation of his famous livery; there was Hoorne, aloof, silent, gloomy, disliking his company only less than he disliked the Cardinal; there was Montigny, young Mansfeld, and Hoogstraaten, gorgeous young knights in brocade and silk; the two graceful younger Nassau Counts; the Marquis Berghen, heavy and corpulent; Brederode; the Seigneur de Glayon; Meghem, alert and warlike; and William of Orange, the man who was the acknowledged leader and centre of these Netherland Seigneurs and Stadtholders.

He was leaning over the high back of a gilt leather chair, talking earnestly of the instances of the atrocities of the Inquisitors which had come to his ears, and of the necessity for resisting them and their protector, Granvelle, to the utmost.

"Granvelle has asked for leave to go to Burgundy," he finished. "From secret information I believe he has asked for leave on Philip's advice, but, be that as it may, it must be our charge to see that once he has left the Netherlands he does not return."

He ceased speaking, but did not move from his easy yet thoughtful attitude while the groups about him broke into animated speech, while above all could be heard the voice of Brederode offering to wring Granvelle's neck if ever he should again set foot in the Netherlands once he had left them.

Rénée gazed at William as he stood quietly observing the others, his

dark face resting on his slim brown hand, a confusion of gold and crimson light falling over his slender figure; she noted the violet sheen of his Sicilian brocade, and the stiff points of the openwork double ruff which encircled his small well-shaped head.

Rénée remembered how she had first seen him coming up the stairs of the town hall of Leipsic to greet his bride, and how, on the evening of his wedding day, she had looked down from a gallery on him, as she was looking now, and seen him move through the slow figures of the dance and sit beside Anne on the gold couch while the mummers brought them lilies and sweetmeats.

Rénée had long since reversed her first judgment of the Prince. She no longer thought him an idle extravagant courtier, she had seen him proved brave, able, resolute; she knew that he set his face against the tyranny which put the Netherlands under the Inquisition, and now she heard him speak for liberty of conscience, for tolerance, for justice for the heretics--those poor creatures about whom great nobles usually concerned themselves not at all.

He cared, however; she had heard him speak in a moved voice of Titelmann's burnings and slayings; she had heard him dare to declare that these things should not be.

She found that she believed in him--strangely, intensely believed in him; it seemed to her that he was only half-revealed even to these men about him, that there was a part of him as yet known to no one, and that he had qualities which had never been guessed. She believed he would go further than he said, do more than he promised, be indeed a buckler and a shield, a light and a sword, to her country.

She drew completely back behind the curtains and put her shuddering hands before her face. She knew now why she had

stayed with Anne, enduring everything; it was because of him, because she wanted to serve him, to hear of him, to be near him, because she thought he was the hero whom she had despaired to find, because she loved him.

Erect and motionless she stood, hearing his voice again as he spoke to his friends--the voice and tone of a self reliant man, but one who eagerly wants sympathy, who almost wistfully asks for trust and belief. Rénée had noticed before this gentleness of the strong nature, this affectionate friendliness of the astute wit, and they were to her eminently lovable traits, for by his gentleness she judged his strength--that greatest strength that is ever allied with sweetness.

As she stood there hidden, listening to his voice, the strangeness of life smote her almost intolerably. He was a great Prince who would never notice her save with that kindness of utter indifference which he would show to any of his servants; there was she, helpless to serve him, bound to eternal abnegation yet dedicated to him with her whole untouched heart and soul; and there was Anne, his wife, to whom he turned for companionship and sympathy, repulsing him fiercely, almost hating him, preferring the society of Duprès, the charlatan, or to drink herself stupid in her chamber rather than share any of his amis and cares.

And to keep her from utter degradation, to soften her furies, to coax her good humour, to excuse her, to put the best of her forward and conceal the worst, that was the only service Rénée could render the Prince--a little thankless service, one that would be never rewarded, not even noticed in its true worth, yet she was glad to do it for this man who was standing for her country and her religion, this man whom she loved.

She heard the grandees leaving--their pleasant voices, the mingled footsteps, the opening and closing of the door.

When silence fell she looked again over the edge of the balcony.

The Prince was alone, seated by the fire, his head bent; by his side was a pretty little white hunting dog, and William's right hand absently caressed its long ears.

His face was in profile to Rénée, and the firelight played over the fine lines of it, the low forehead, the straight nose, the firm mouth and chin, the compact head with the dark close hair; he was slightly frowning, and his brows were drawn over his eyes usually so wide open and vivacious.

In refinement, precision of outline, exactness of proportion, and expression both of elegance and force, he looked that perfect type, at once intellectual and athletic, which the ancients gave to their heroes—a type so removed from coarseness or grossness as to appear almost delicate, yet in reality strong with the supreme strength of a brain perfectly adjusted and a mind perfectly balanced and a body admirably made.

The twilight began to enter the sombre, magnificent chamber, and all the colours of glass windows, rich furniture, brilliant tapestry were blended into one deep glowing shadow, in the midst of which the dying ruby gleam of the fire brought out the figure of the Prince in his gorgeous brocades, his thoughtful face now serene as a fine mask, leaning back in his gilt chair and gazing in the flames, so wholly unconscious of that loving spectator who watched him so breathlessly from the gallery.

At last she moved away, quietly through the shadows, down the dark stairs and back to her duty. Anne was in her usual place by the stove, drinking sugared beer, and little Katrine was moving about the room sobbing under her breath with a great red mark on her face where

her mistress had slapped her for being late.

Rénée whispered to the girl to go away, and herself commenced the duties of putting in order all the Princess's disarranged things.

Anne began railing at her in a voice broken with tears; the waiting-woman hardly heard, for in her ears were the words she had just heard the Prince speak, and before her eyes the picture of him in the twilight, alone and thoughtful.

XIII - The Departure Of The Cardinal

Cardinal Granvelle had asked and obtained leave to go to Burgundy to see his mother, whom he had not beheld for nineteen years.

That was now common knowledge, and a tumult of rejoicing broke forth which frightened the Regent almost more than the tumult of rage and hate which had preceded it.

For it seemed as if the people believed that with the departure of the Cardinal all their wrongs and miseries would end and the golden age begin; pamphlets, lampoons, caricatures, issued in hundreds from the secret printing presses, were scattered in the streets, pasted on the walls of the churches, and found their way even to Granvelle's cabinet and Margaret's antechamber; the rhetoric players became daily bolder and performed their satirical plays before huge audiences who forcibly protected the actors; heretic preachers addressed their followers even from the pulpits of churches from which the priests had been driven, and two of them, condemned to the flames by the Inquisition at Antwerp, were rescued, even after they had been chained to the stake, by the furious people, who carried them back in triumph to their lodgings.

And it was not only the people who thus recklessly displayed their joy

at the departure of the hated minister. The victorious nobles, particularly Egmont and Brederode, openly exulted in the downfall of their enemy, for none of them believed that the object of his visit was more than an excuse, and it was generally thought that his journey to Burgundy was a mere pretext for retiring with dignity from a position he could no longer maintain.

Various rumours were abroad: some said the Cardinal had asked to be removed from the Netherlands, others that he was obeying secret orders from Philip and was furious at leaving the contest with the grandees, but whichever of their surmises might be correct it was certain that he was leaving and almost as sure that he would not return. Already a wit had pasted a notice "to be sold" over his villa "La Fontaine," and much laughter was provoked by the famous statue with "*Durate*" on the pedestal, which word had a mocking sound now.

But through all this hearty, intense, noisy rejoicing of the Netherlander the Cardinal remained serene. Perhaps what gave him his calm was his knowledge of the other side of the picture; he knew Madrid, he knew Philip; he knew too how all this present rejoicing would be paid for some day, how Philip had marked and noted the names of these gay nobles who had driven out his minister, how all the reckless jests, pasquinades and speeches, the famous insolence of Egmont's livery, the disloyalty of Berghen and Montigny, were all known to Philip, and by him patiently and painstakingly noted down. Philip knew how to wait, but he had a memory no detail escaped. Granvelle was not vindictive, and he was too politic to be inclement; he had no desire to be avenged on the men who had caused his downfall, and his last words to the Regent were to advise her to overlook the present disorders. Indeed he disdained all his opponents save one only, the Prince of Orange.

He saw that without him the other nobles would be nothing; he was

the guiding spirit of Egmont and Hoorne, neither of whom could have stood alone, and the first of whom, at least, would easily have been won by the Cardinal but for Orange.

"He is a dangerous man," said Granvelle with admiration, and loyally warned his master; then, with an unruffled spirit and a smile for all, set out on his journey to Burgundy.

Brussels seethed with excitement and joy; the members of the great trade guilds, the armourers, the cloth makers, the glovers, the gardeners, turned out in bands and paraded the streets; many of the shops closed while the servers and apprentices went out to see the Cardinal pass; parties of Protestants went about singing the hymns of Marot, and defying the law. It was a general holiday, and the only people angry and discomfited were the Cardinalists, Barlaymont, Aerschot, and Vigilius, who saw their power at an end; even the Regent was glad to see Granvelle go, for she hoped and imagined that the seigneurs would be easier to manage than the astute and able priest.

"Poor Madame Parma," remarked the Cardinal to his brother, the Seigneur de Chantonay, who accompanied him in his carriage, "she cannot manage her charge at all. His Majesty should send a man to the Netherlands."

"The Duke of Alva for example," replied Chantonay, who hated the Netherlanders.

"Alva is too severe," returned Granvelle; "these are people who will not bear too light a curb, too heavy a yoke. Alva has already recommended the taking off of the heads of Egmont and Hoorne."

"Why not?" said the other, who was vexed at his brother's fall and extremely irritated by the joyous and insolent farewells being given to

the cavalcade as it passed towards the gates. "They are little better than rebels/

"Egmont is more useful to His Majesty alive than dead better buy him than behead him."

"Is he to be bought?"

"Easily--poor, extravagant, vain--"

"But he is under the influence of Orange," said Chantonnay.

Granvelle smiled.

"There you have the crux of the situation, my friend," he replied. "The Prince of Orange. That is the man to strike, the others are boys and roysterers but he knows how to use them. If it had not been for him I should not be leaving the Netherlands now."

"Why is he so disloyal?" asked Chantonnay peevishly.

"Ah, who knows what game he plays!" replied the Cardinal rather wearily. "He is serving neither King nor Church, so he must be serving himself--ambition!"

They had now nearly reached the gates of Caudenberg, and the Cardinal's escort, princely train and numerous equipages, were blocked for a moment by the narrowness of the streets and the pressure of the exulting crowds. Chantonnay was afraid of violence, even of assassination; there had been rumours of hired murderers lying in wait for the Cardinal, ready to take the first opportunity of attack; but Granvelle, who had driven alone and unarmed at night out to his country residence, was not to be frightened now, though the crowd might very well be dangerous.

He looked steadily and keenly out of the coach window at the faces of his enemies.

"They are sturdy people," he remarked, "who will give the King much trouble. And what truly grieves me is to see what little respect there is for holy things, one might say that there is no religion left in the land."

"Yet the great nobles have taken the Cardinal's Hat from the livery, I observe," said Chantonnay, "and put instead a bunch of arrows."

"The Duchess requested it," returned the Cardinal, who was still intently observing the crowd. "But what helps that? The Hat but meant insult to me and God's poor priests, whereas the arrows mean that they are banded together against the King, which is a declaration of rebellion no monarch should endure."

The carriage now moved on, and the Cardinal leant back in his seat; he had been looking to see if any of the nobles were among the crowd, for he wished to report very exactly the behaviour of these seigneurs to Philip. So far he had noticed none above the baser sort, but presently, as they neared the gate, he looked out again and up at the house near by where he knew Brederode had his lodgings.

And there at one of the windows was the Count together with the Count Hoogstraaten, the two of them laughing and throwing up their caps and clapping their hands in undisguised triumph and delight. This boyish exultation brought to Granvelle's cheek the angry flush the stately victory of William of Orange had failed to evoke; the brilliant minister, the skilful politician, the haughty priest tasted humiliation when he saw himself the butt of the malicious wits of these two young cavaliers.

He drew into the farthest corner of the carriage, but they had seen him, and, leaning out of the window, shouted their farewells with

redoubled pleasure as the procession finally passed through the gates.

Then, with the common impulse not to let their defeated enemy escape too cheaply, they rushed down to the courtyard.

"I must see the last of the old fox!" cried Hoogstraaten, and he flung himself on his horse which stood waiting for him.

"I too!" laughed Brederode, "and as I am not booted I will come with you."

So saying he leapt on the Count's croup, and they dashed through street and gates in pursuit of the Cardinal's stately cortege, which was attended by a number of sumpter-mules, lent him by the Duchess.

The two knights on the one horse, Hoogstraaten in his buff and gold riding suit, his black velvet cap with the long heron's feather fastened by an emerald, his violet mantle; Brederode in the tawny damask satin, Flanders lace, scarlet points, and silk hose, in which he had danced nearly all through the night, were at once recognized by the crowd and cheered and applauded as heartily as the Cardinal had been hissed and execrated.

Brederode gaily waved the mantle he had snatched up as a pretence at a disguise, and laughed over the edge of his triple ruff which was something broken and something stained, and the couple plunged through the gates and out on to the road where the Cardinal was commencing his stately, if tedious, progress towards Namur, the first stage of the journey.

There were several others following the cavalcade, notably one of Egmont's gentlemen, and one who was in the employ of the Marquis

Berghen, that nobleman whom the Cardinal disliked and feared next to the Prince of Orange.

But there was no representative of the House of Nassau dogging the retreat of His Eminence, and William would have been far from pleased had he known of the exploit of Hoogstraaten and Brederode.

For a while these two cavaliers kept a discreet distance from the Cardinal, and remained at the side of the road in the rear and near to the baggage mules.

But this did not long satisfy Brederode; he wished to ride by Granville's actual carriage, and to let him see who was escorting him on his journey.

And so, when the road fell into a little ravine, the two cavaliers rode along the edge of the height until they were beside the carriage and could look down on it, and when the way was level again they reappeared at the edge of the autumn forest, near enough to His Eminence's coach to look in at the window.

Granville's attention was attracted by Chantannay to this spectacle of two men on one horse, and he looked out of the carriage.

Hoogstraaten had thrown his mantle over the lower part of his face, but Brederode's reckless face was uncovered save for the brown curls the March wind blew across his brow and cheeks (for he was hatless).

The Cardinal knew both instantly.

"They are buffoons," he remarked, but though he tried thus to dismiss the incident, it vexed him; however, the annoyance passed when he reflected how dearly the jesters were likely to pay for their

jest.

The two cavaliers, regardless of the fact that the Cardinal had seen them and that therefore a full account of their exploit was certain to reach Philip, continued to follow the cavalcade in its slow progress over the rough, muddy winter roads until they reached a high piece of rising ground that commanded a full view of the surrounding country—bare woods, fields, hedges, disappearing into the cold blue mist of the distance.

Here they waited, and looking scornfully down on the Cardinal's coach as it passed, watched it lumbering along the road to Namur until a turn hid it from their eyes.

"At the first stage Granvelle will write of this to the Duchess," remarked Hoogstraaten, in a grave voice; his high spirits had left him, his prudence, though not his courage, was alarmed at what he had done.

But Brederode laughed; prudence was as unknown to him as fear; he had a far better claim than Philip to the Countship of all Holland, for his ancestry went unbrokenly back five hundred years to the ancient sovereigns of that province. In his heart he regarded the King as a usurper, and he had no respect either for him or his ministers; indeed, his furious loathing of Granvelle and his policies was based on his hatred of seeing his native land, where his forebears had ruled, in the hands of foreigners.

"Well, we have seen the last flick of the fox's tail," he said joyously, "and now we may go home to dinner, this keen air has given me an appetite."

Hoogstraaten turned the horse's head towards Brussels.

"Yes, the Cardinal has gone, but his disciples remain," he answered thoughtfully.

"The seigneurs will see to them," said Brederode confidently.

"Ah, I know not," remarked Hoogstraaten; "I believe Armenteros, the Regent's secretary, has more influence with her than Orange himself. But we shall see."

"Ay, we shall see, my Anthony," returned Brederode, "for my part I do not think so gloomily; if Armenteros behave as Granvelle has, then he may follow the same road—we have cast down a Cardinal, do you think we are to be baffled by a clerk?"

And he began to sing a cheerful song in a merry bass voice which rose very pleasantly over the still winter woodlands.

When they reached the Caudenberg gate they found the city still full of joyous emotion, and received as noisy a greeting as they had done on their departure.

Hoogstraaten would have dismounted at Brederode's lodgings, but that nobleman would by no means permit it, and they continued their progress through the city, exchanging joyful congratulations and greetings with those who were making a festival of Granvelle's departure.

As they made their way up the high streets which led to the ancient Brabant palace which was the Regent's residence, they were hailed by a half-laughing voice, and the Prince of Orange galloped alongside them.

"We have escorted His Eminence on the road to Namur!" cried Brederode.

"And though hungry and thirsty and cold," added Hoogstraaten, "we are now joining in the rejoicings of the good citizens."

"Ah, seigneurs," said William, with a little smile, "one day your pleasantries will end in a mischief, I fear."

"To our enemies, yes," replied Brederode. "Where is Your Highness going?"

"To wait on the Regent."

"So soon?"

"Ay, Margaret having flung away one prop must seize another; she is a weak woman and cannot stand alone," remarked Hoogstraaten.

"Shall we see you at supper to-night?" asked Brederode, as the Prince touched up his horse.

"Nay," smiled the Prince, "a wise man avoids your suppers, my Brederode, at least when he has business to perform."

"I have an excellent cook," pleaded the Count.

William, still smiling, shook his head and rode on towards the Brabant palace.

He went slowly, without parade or a single attendant, greeted affectionately and loyally by most of the people, for though some were doubtful of his attitude, the bulk believed that he would defend their liberties, and a great number even of the heretics had their hope in the great Catholic Prince who had already spoken against the Inquisition.

To-day, too, he was regarded by the people with added respect and

interest, for it was clear that now the Cardinal had fallen, the Prince, as the principal member of the league that had brought about Granvelle's downfall, would be the greatest man in the Netherlands. Many wistful eyes were turned towards him as he rode, for many felt their fate was in his hands.

His deportment was not that of a man either triumphant or joyous; he was pale beneath the clear brown of his proper complexion, his eyes were guarded and thoughtful, and though he smiled with his usual pleasantness at those of his acquaintances he met, his manner was absent, and he seemed neither so gay nor so careless as he had done even a few days before.

When he reached the Brabant palace he met Egmont leaving the gates; the Count was flushed with pleasure at the reception the Regent had given him, and loud in his protestations of loyalty to Church and King; he was disposed to be frank and generous in his triumphs, and to heartily forgive all his enemies now the chief of them had been removed.

William regarded him affectionately, but said very little, and his air was still grave as he entered the palace.

XIV - The Regent, The Prince, And The Cardinalist

Margaret received William warmly; she already spoke of the Cardinal with dislike and vexation, declared herself rejoiced to be rid of him, and showed every intention of flattering the men who had replaced him and his party and who must henceforth be supreme in her councils.

But the Prince was not captured by these compliments as Egmont

had been; he had his agents at the Spanish Court, he knew something of the other side of the picture, and while Margaret was speaking he was looking at Armenteros, the arrogant Spanish secretary, who remained in the chamber. In this man, known to be deep in Philip's confidence and intimate with the Duchess, William beheld Granville's true successor.

At the same time he was perfectly well aware that Margaret knew his great influence, his unique position, and was sincerely desirous of attaching him to her; indeed, it was quite clear to the Prince that the Regent, despite her haughtiness, her pose of firmness, and independence, was sorely bewildered and confused how to manage her perilous wardship of the Netherlands, and eager enough for help and counsel.

But the Prince was not the man to sympathize with an arrogant woman unequal to her charge; he deemed a woman as out of place in government as a man at a spinning-wheel, though one who was queen by right and not by choice would have had his deep loyalty, but Margaret, however, was practically a foreigner, and lording in a place not her own, and neither the character of this woman who assumed such masculine qualities and was in reality so weak and futile, nor the rank of this Princess whose mother had been the daughter of a poor weaver of Oudenarde, could inspire any respect or admiration in the Prince.

He considered her as but a poor instrument of Philip's policy, and even while she was offering him the courtesies she thought so diplomatic, he was wondering how long she would hold her place.

Margaret on her side was uneasy; she could not read the Prince, she did not wholly trust him, yet she knew him to be necessary to her. With Egmont she had felt far safer; whatever his extravagances he was obviously loyal, obviously a good Catholic, and she was sure of

the Prince on neither of these points; indeed, the painstaking Regent, sincerely eager to do her duty towards Philip and the Church, was secretly sorely puzzled how to deal with William.

She proceeded to endeavour to win, and if possible deceive, him by cajoleries and blandishments, as she had already won and deceived Egmont, for her politics were those of Machiavelli and Loyola.

"Now the Cardinal has gone," she said, "I can surround myself with my good friends whom he kept from me, and I hope all will go more smoothly and prosperously, both in my councils and the states, without this meddling priest."

William smiled into his ruff; by her abuse of Granvelle he could measure what she had said of him to the Cardinal, what she would, most likely, be writing to that minister within a few hours.

"There will be more prosperity for His Majesty's subjects and less anxiety for those who serve His Majesty, if His Eminence's counsels are reversed," he said.

Margaret regarded him with an anxiety she could not altogether conceal; her full bosom heaved beneath the gathered lawn and the Genoa velvet, and a quiver passed over her majestic face which she endeavoured to keep so regally impassive.

"It is to be supposed his policies are to be reversed, Highness," she answered, "since his enemies will take his place;" then remembering that the Cardinal's absence was supposed to be only a temporary one, "It may be some while before he returns to the Netherlands, and meanwhile we need not consult him," she added.

"Will he return at all?" smiled William, looking straightly at her. "I scarcely think so, Madame."

The Duchess, who had had Philip's secret instructions to allow the Cardinal to depart, and who knew that the visit to Burgundy was an elaborate ruse to disguise the downfall of the minister, was startled at the Prince's words. "How much does he know?" she thought, and her respect and awe of him increased.

"The Cardinal's return must be in His Majesty's good pleasure," she replied, smiling in her turn. "Meanwhile we have other things to think of. I have asked Your Highness here, to this private audience, because I know you to be of a nature as noble as your rank, and because I want you to aid and support me in the task I have before me, which is not, the Virgin help me, a light one."

Behind the obvious flattery of the words was a sincere feminine appeal for help, and her eyes were turned on the Prince with a real anxiety.

"Surely, Madame," replied William, "you do not think I should be disloyal to you? I know I have been greatly slandered, but I trust you have never believed disloyalty of me."

"Nay, nay," said Margaret. "I did not even think of disloyalty--but I have had to complain, with justice, that you have so obstinately kept aloof from my councils."

"Because my presence was useless where no one was listened to save Granvelle and his creatures, Madame."

"That is over," replied the Duchess, "and now I rely on the seigneurs and principally on Your Highness."

"I hope to deserve the trust," said William, "and to advise Your Grace for the peace and welfare of the States."

Margaret felt the words formal; she perceived that he could play with phrases as well as she, and that she was unlikely to gain much from him this way. While she was turning over in her mind the best way to gain him, William spoke again, using a frankness that was more subtle and more baffling than all Margaret's tortuous methods and policies.

"Your Excellency will not enforce the Inquisition?" he asked, he was looking at Margaret, but he noted the little movement the silent secretary made at his words.

"I have recommended mercy and gentleness to Peter Titelmann," replied the Regent, "and I ever beg His Majesty to use clemency towards the Netherlands."

"But you will enforce the Inquisition?" persisted the Prince.

"It cannot be supposed," answered Margaret suavely, "that the King will endure heresy among his subjects."

"It is then his intention to extirpate heresy?" asked William, and he remembered that conversation with Henry of France in the woods of Vincennes.

"An intention known to all the world," asserted Margaret. "His Majesty would rather lose his kingdoms than endure that heresy should flourish under his rule."

They were almost the same words that Granvelle had used in the gardens of La Fontaine.

"None the less," added Margaret, "His Majesty awaits the decision of the Council of Trent before proceeding severely against these wretches."

"Meanwhile," said William, "the Inquisitors are burning, strangling, torturing in every town in the States."

Margaret flushed angrily.

"Those who are thus punished are miserable blasphemers--would Your Highness speak for a man who remained covered while the Host passed, or one who mocked a statue of the Virgin?"

"I would not burn them quick," replied William, "nay, I would not touch their lives at all, nor yet their properties."

"Your Highness has of late been dangerously clement towards these heretics," remarked the Duchess.

"It is but natural," replied the Prince, with a smile, "since most of those dearest to me are heretics. But I do not speak from clemency but from policy when I advise Your Grace to toleration."

Again the secretary made that little movement; William could imagine the letter he would write to Philip.

"Toleration?" cried the Duchess angrily; "do you advise me to accord toleration to heretics?"

"Yes," said William, and he looked at the Spaniard sitting quiet in his corner, for he felt he was speaking not to Margaret but to Philip, and that his words, spoken in this chamber of the Brabant palace, would soon be known in that cell of the Escorial where the laborious King sat painstakingly annotating his lengthy and innumerable dispatches.

The Duchess knew not what to answer; all her policy of flattery and conciliation was overwhelmed by the rage and contempt she felt for William's views, which vexed her the more as she vaguely knew they were, from the point of policy, right.

"The Netherlands," continued William, "will never take the Inquisition. They will never give up heresy. If they are forced they will be maddened into a revolt."

"The King will know how to deal with revolt," returned Margaret haughtily.

"The King," said William, again turning his dark eyes on Armenteros, "will scarcely provoke a revolt. He has too much wisdom and too little right."

"You question the King's right?" exclaimed the Duchess aghast.

"Madame," the Prince reminded her, "the States and the cities have charters and liberties older than the sovereignty of the House of Burgundy. And both His Majesty and the Queen Mary, the late Regent, swore to protect these liberties."

"But the King cannot, will not, endure heresy!" cried Margaret.

"The Emperor was as good a Catholic as His Majesty," said William, "and he suffered heresy in his dominions when he was leaguings with the Protestant Princes of Germany. Therefore the King may suffer it sooner than spoil, ruin, and lose the richest portion of his realms."

"They would not revolt they would not dare!" said Margaret.

"They will dare a great deal, these Netherlanders, once they are roused," returned the Prince, "as Your Grace may have observed in the great numbers who refuse to recant their heresy, even for their lives, and in those who proclaim their faith knowing well what the penalties are."

"Your Highness is very zealous in the cause of these wretched

people," said the Duchess, with some bitterness.

"Call me zealous in the cause of His Majesty," replied William. "Before God, all I say and do is loyally said and done, and with the sole desire to preserve peace and contentment and obedience in these States."

"I do believe you," returned Margaret hastily; she was unwilling to provoke further disputes, and considered it easier to take the Prince at the mere face value of his words than to endeavour, as she might so easily have done, to find offence in the possible meanings of them. "I believe and trust Your Highness, and shall look to your good help and counsel to assist me."

The question of the enforcement of the Inquisition was thus evaded; it was a question Margaret preferred not to have to answer, and one William saw no use in insisting on, so well did he know the mind of the Regent and the King on this subject.

"Time," he contented himself by saying, "will prove if I am right in what I say; and also my honest purpose to serve His Majesty and Your Grace."

He rose, and again his glance travelled to the keen, sharp face of the secretary, who had now risen also and stood very respectfully in his corner.

"Does he think I do not know that he is a spy on me?" considered William, as he kissed the Regent's hand; "does she think I am going to be her tool to do hangman's work?"

He took his leave: Margaret gracious and smiling, pressing him and his family to come to her banquets, beseeching his frequent presence at her councils; the secretary all deference and stately

homage.

When William had closed the door behind him, he laughed softly, then, as he turned away down the tapestried corridor, he sighed.

It might be easy to read Margaret, even to manage her; it might be easy, too, to influence and control those who composed her councils; but behind Margaret was the most powerful, the most fanatic, the most unscrupulous, the most obstinate King in the world, and behind him and his Inquisition was a more powerful force still the entire might, the whole weight of the Holy Roman Church, armed not only with the fire and sword of this world, but the punishments of hell and the rewards of heaven.

The liberties of the Netherlands were signed and sealed in laws and charters, but what could parchment and ink avail against the temporal power of Philip; the heretics might be courageous and unyielding, but what were they compared to the spiritual power of the Pope, supported by all the great Princes of Europe?

And what could William of Orange hope to achieve if he set himself against any of the desires of Philip? Merely that speedy and mysterious death that awaited the King's disobedient servants.

These thoughts did not occur to Egmont, to Montigny, to Brederode, to the other seigneurs who rejoiced in the departure of Granvelle; they knew themselves free from even a treasonable thought, and considered themselves as safe as the Regent herself from the wrath of Philip.

But William had been educated at the Emperor's Court; he had been for a while intimate with Philip; he knew by heart the intricate policies of the Court, the blind fanaticism, the narrow vanity, the dull obstinacy of the King; and as surely as if he had seen it with his own eyes he

knew his name headed a list of the seigneurs the King kept until he could one by one strike them off the paper--on the day when they would be struck off the earth.

Therefore he knew the difficulties, the perils of his position, though did no one else in the Netherlands, and he had reason for looking thoughtful while Brederode jested and the others laughed. As he was passing down the great stairs he met Barlaymont coming up.

This man, Granvelle's most detested follower, and the one who had betrayed to him the secrets of the league of seigneurs formed against him, was now entirely in disgrace. The Duchess received him with rudeness, and those who had formerly fawned on him now rushed to pay court to his ascendant enemies. He was white and haggard with humiliation and vexation, his eyes red with bitter tears.

He looked up, coloured at seeing William, and paused.

The Prince came down slowly, a slender figure in a cross-cut doublet of a peacock colour, a mantle of red and black fur; he carried his cap and switch under his arm, and was fastening his fringed gauntlets with a gold thread.

"Your Highness has soon come to the scene of your triumph," said Barlaymont.

William turned serene eyes on him.

"Ah, Baron, I do not triumph," he said, half sadly.

"I think Your Highness does when you step into the place of the man you have cast down."

"It was not I," replied William, "it was the Netherlands that would not endure the Cardinal."

"You take refuge behind that," said Barlaymont bitterly, "but it shall not save you. Now you exult. Now you think to put your foot on our party, and for a time you may. But I tell you that you have won a perilous victory."

"I know it," said the Prince.

"Now you are supreme, now you are the favourite," continued the fallen minister. "But the King is not so easily dared, so safely affronted. As surely as now you are uppermost, Philip will call you and those behind you to account--to a very stern account, Highness."

"You speak as the mouthpiece of Madrid," said the Prince, "and doubtless have good authority for these threats. Tell those who instructed you that I know my position and their power."

"I speak for myself only," replied Barlaymont, "to let you know that I am only for the moment disgraced and humiliated down as I am, I would not change to stand in your Highness's place I Nay, I would not wear your present honours at the cost you must pay--"

"I do believe it," answered William; "but you and I are different men, Barlaymont, and my house has never shirked perilous honours."

He bent his head and passed on, lacing again his glove.

About the bottom of the stairs a flood of crimson light lay, cast by the two windows filled with red and gold glass, through which the last rays of the winter sun was streaming; and as William descended, it gradually enveloped him and dyed him red as if he was passing into a sea of blood, over his feet, to his waist, to his shoulders, closing over his head.

Then he passed into the darkness of the shadowed hall beyond and

was lost to Barlaymont's watching eyes.

PART II - The Holy Inquisition

"Lièver Turcx dan Paus."

Legend on a Beggar Medal, 1574

I - THE PIGEON

The sunshine of late summer was mellow in the beautiful room that looked on the garden where the last roses bloomed amid the heavy luxuriance of foreign shrubs and flowers; golden the fair light of afternoon filled the chamber as amber-coloured wine might fill a dark cup, and there was no sound save the insistent ticking of the tall clock in the corner.

The room served no particular purpose, but was a mere antechamber to the library or corridor between that and a great chamber used for receptions and feasts.

Rénée le Meung stood at the window looking on the hushed and sunny garden. She liked this chamber, and spent her little leisure there. She was not commonly disturbed, as the Prince's luxurious household seldom used this handsome library, and she had come to be fond of the room, to regard it almost as her own--more her own than the hot little bedchamber under the eaves, where she was within sound of Anne's persistent bell and ceaseless shrill demands.

She knew and liked the several pieces of furniture here the large dark cupboard opposite to the window which was polished till it gleamed like steel; the Spanish chairs with gilt leather fringed seats either side; the waxed and shining picture, as bright as a jewel and as flat as a mosaic, that hung above the door into the library, and the

other picture, a portrait of a fat, stern gentleman in black, handling the massive chain round his neck, which was opposite above the other door; and the tall wooden clock with the delicately engraved steel face and the numbers cut in flourishes fine as pen-strokes.

There was no other furnishing save the three brocade cushions that filled the seat of the high Gothic window, yet the chamber had an air of richness and beauty and peace.

Rénée's eyes lifted presently to the picture above the library door and dwelt there curiously.

It was a Flemish painting, perhaps a hundred years old, and represented a young saint, Agnes, Barbara, or Cecilia, being led out to martyrdom.

The virgin, robed in white, with fair hair, combed carefully in thin curls over her slanting shoulders, stood in the midst of a neat and flowery field, on which daisies and other little plants shone like stars.

She lifted her round and smiling face, which was freshly coloured and seemed never to have known care nor trouble, to a clear and lovely blue sky.

Behind her the executioners, elaborately clad in ruffled scarlet breeches and embroidered doublet, stood ready with rope and axe, and in the distance a hill town showed against the blue horizon with the distinctness of a toy model.

The picture fascinated Renée, it was so serene, so pleasant, so far removed from horror or disgust, terror or pain, that it might make a tired soul long to die that way, calm and smiling in a daisied meadow that was but one step from the paradise where a martyr's crown was already being plaited by the angels and saints.

There were martyrs now; men, women, and children as pious, as steadfast as any of the early Christians whom heathens slaughtered and to whom altars were set up all over Europe, died every day in the Netherlands. But not that way.

Rénée knew it was not that way, the way of peace, with flowers beneath and the blue heavens above--nay, it was in the common day-time, amid the sordid surroundings of the market-place, with insults, with jeers, with flames, smoke, the shrieks of fellow-victims, the frenzied preaching of the monks, the groans of the crowd, with their ravaged homes perhaps within sight, their frantic children driven back by the soldiers, with all the details of pain and misery and dreariness, with none to comfort nor encourage--Rénée knew that this was how the Netherlands died--daily by every manner of torture, by every form of terrible and horrible death.

There were some who were never seen in the marketplace nor on the public gallows; these were they who were thrown into the prisons of the Holy Inquisition, and never more came forth from the dark only lit by the glare of the torture fires, or the silence broken only by groans of mortal agony and the calm adjurations of the monks.

Rénée turned her eyes away from the picture. "It was never like that," she said to herself; "--it lies and who can tell that the heavens opened to receive them, and the saints crowded to welcome them? Who can tell? Who has seen it?"

She gazed into the Prince's garden, but the fairness of it brought no peace to her heart.

A warm breeze waved the costly flowers and the carefully tended trees in the groves and alleys. Two young men were playing tennis in the foremost court; the white balls sped gracefully against the green, the soft-shod figures moved noiselessly to and fro behind the nets.

In and out of the gables and crevices of the palace pigeons flew; their hoarse cooing was steady in the stillness. Now and then their strong wings beat past the window, and presently one settled on the open lattice, and moving its flexible head, gazed at Rénée with an eye as red and bright as a ruby.

She looked at the bird with admiration; it was an exquisite thing, white and black shot with purple, all gleaming in the sunlight and ruffled with pride.

Then suddenly, as Rénée looked, it flew straight past her into the room and beat against the black bureau.

Rénée rose and clapped her hands to frighten it away, but the bird clung to the polished wood, fluttering the gleaming wings, the soft body panting and quivering.

As she approached, it flew again with a powerful stroke of the fine wings cutting the air, and beat frantically from door to door, passing and repassing the open window.

"Poor silly thing!" cried Rénée; "so do we all beat about in our prisons when the door is open on the sky!"

The pigeon settled on the frame of the Flemish picture, and looked down, palpitating, the tumbled breast heaving, the bright eyes alert and anxious.

Rénée stood helpless by the open window, her hand on her bosom and a little flush of colour in her grave face.

The opening of the door from the reception room caused her to turn with a start (she was so seldom disturbed in this chamber) and the pigeon to fly up and round the ceiling.

He who entered shut the door instantly and gave a quick glance at Rénée in her warm, opulent beauty and severe blue gown, and then at the bird flashing like a gleam of light in the dusky darkness of the high ceiling.

It was the Prince.

Rénée stood in a foolish confusion; it was long since she had seen him save at a distance, and his sudden appearance bewildered her completely.

"The bird is a prisoner?" he asked, and he spoke quite gravely, though he smiled a little.

"It will not see the open window, Highness," she replied; and as she spoke, the pigeon circled lower in exhausted fashion, and settled on the back of one of the black chairs.

The Prince put out his hand gently and easily and caught the bird by the wings, and so held it out, the coral-coloured feet contracted, the red gold-rimmed eyes bright with fear.

He took the struggling creature to the window and let it fly; it sped far away, above and beyond the tennis court.

He turned to look at Rénée. Their eyes met; words rushed to her lips, and she spoke almost without meaning to and against her own awe and shamefacedness.

"Oh, Seigneur!" she exclaimed, "you are so tender with a little bird, will you not do something for the Netherlands?"

His look was surprised, almost startled. "Do I not do something for them?" he asked.

"I do not know," was wrung from Rénèe's bitter heart.

"Your Highness is orthodox. Your Highness conforms. There were great hopes of you--I, among the first, believed; but now--the time goes--and--you do nothing!"

Then, seeing his expression of marvel, her face became burning with painful red, and she turned her head quickly away.

"It must be to Your Highness as if your dog should turn to speak to you," she said humbly. "I entreat you to pass on and forget."

"No," replied William, with perfect graciousness. "It is not my way to either pass on or forget. Tell me what you mean."

"I cannot," said Rénèe. "My heart is very full, and prompts me to foolishness. I am a heretic, and therefore life cannot be pleasant to me."

"But you are safe here," answered the Prince gently.

That stung her into again forgetting who he was and her own insignificance.

"That makes it more horrible!" she cried, and she turned towards him. Her flushed and glowing face was very beautiful in its utter unconsciousness of either beauty or allure. "I am safe, but others better than I die every day--die horribly--burned alive, buried alive, tortured to death. The Netherlands are a shambles, Seigneur; the smoke of human sacrifice founs the air. And it will be worse."

"Ay," said William quietly. "If the King enforce the findings of the Council of Trent, it will be worse."

"He will not dare!" exclaimed the girl, "for that would mean to exterminate the Netherlands."

"I do not know what he would dare," returned William, in the same low, quiet tone. "I do not know."

Rénée bit her lip to keep the hot words back; the long habit of her servitude controlled her to silence. She stood dutifully waiting for him to go from her presence, and forget her amid the thousand incidents of his gorgeous life.

But instead he stopped directly before her and spoke again, kindly, but with a certain challenge.

"What makes you appeal to me? What makes you think I could or would do anything for these heretics against whom the infallible voice of the Church has just cried, 'Anathema, three times anathema?'"

His tone spurred her to answer.

"Because you are the greatest Prince in the land--because the people have faith in you."

"But I am only half trusted," he smiled. "You may see as many pasquils pasted on my walls as on those of any man in Brussels."

"That is because Your Highness will not declare yourself. At one time, when you led the faction against the Cardinal, we all hoped--" her voice faltered a little--"but since then you have chosen to be secret, close--"

"There are others," he said--"Brederode, Egmont, Hoorne--"

"Ah," replied Rénée, lifted beyond her tumultuous fear of him, the sweet dread of his presence, "none of these is the man we seek. In

the people is the strength, the ardour, the force; these nobles dance and jest and brawl and spend, but do they believe, do they care would they *die* for their God? All in the hands of Philip, all conforming to Church and State, all bowing the neck to the Regent and Peter Titelmann with his Holy Inquisition."

"You do some wrong," said William. "Montigny and Berghen have refused to enforce the Inquisition in their provinces, and all the nobles have protested to His Majesty against the dicta of the Council of Trent becoming law in the Netherlands."

"Forgive me," said Rénée, "I fear I grow bitter—I forget all bounds I forget even that I am your servant."

"Speak to me," answered the Prince. "I would hear your thoughts. It is not often I meet with one so well versed in affairs, and so warm-hearted. You are a fair young woman," he added, with great gentleness, "to be so weighted with sad business."

The blood flowed back on her heart and left her unnaturally pale at these kind words from him; she dared to look into his face; he stood near enough for her to have touched him with a half-outstretched hand.

Her quick glance saw that his face was tired in expression; his dress, black, gold, and crimson, less gorgeous than usual, almost careless compared with his habitual magnificence.

The small head with the close waves of stiff dark chestnut hair was held a little droopingly; the charming ardent countenance, brilliant and dark, the dusky complexion showing the fine blood in warm tints, the wide vivacious eyes, the lips soft and firm, was overcast, the level brows knitted, the firm chin fallen on the double ruff of gold-edged cambric.

What was troubling him, servant of King Philip, principal adviser of the Regent, most powerful noble in the Netherlands? What care had he unless the woes of these wretched thousands the Council of Trent had condemned to fire for soul and body touched and moved him?

In his gravity, in his look of fatigue and preoccupation, Rénée found hope; she stepped back from him and stood with her shoulders pressed against the window embrasure where the waxed wood gleamed in the sunlight that was reddening to the west.

"Oh, you could do so much, you could do it all," she said, and her gentle voice was rough and unsteady with passion. "I have dreamt it--others have thought it--you, you might be the man! You might redeem us from slavery, from tyranny, from misery unutterable you are he who might defy Philip."

"I am his subject," said William, narrowing his eyes on her face, "and I am a Papist."

"But you are united to Protestant princes, and the young princes, your brothers, are heretics," she answered, as if she was pleading with him.

"I am in Philip's service," he said, and lifted his head, looking at her straightly and intently.

She was quick in her reply.

"But your first loyalty is to the statutes of this land, which Philip rends and spurns, and your first obligation is the freedom and liberty of the land you help govern."

"Ah! You know that, do you?" exclaimed the Prince, and his expressive face changed, and seemed for a moment to be joyous;

then the look of reserve closed over the flash of daring and animation, and he added quietly: "The Regent has sent a protest to His Majesty telling him it is impossible to enforce stringent laws against heretics in the Netherlands. And it is likely, it must be, that the King will see reason in her arguments."

"Is it likely?" asked Rénée, looking steadily at the Prince. "Your Highness knows the King."

"Why, if he does not--" said William, then suddenly checked himself.

"If he does not?" repeated the girl swiftly. "What will Your Highness do?"

He seemed to utterly withdraw into himself, and his face was smooth and serene as a mask.

"I see you still have hopes of me," he smiled.

She could not answer; she felt that he was lightly putting her off, gently showing her she had overstepped all etiquette, only to speak folly. Her enthusiasm, her exaltation were swept away by a wave of humiliation. She stood with downcast eyes, trembling in her place.

William looked at her.

"My child," he said, with that note of pity and tenderness in his voice Rénée found unbearable, "there was never tyrant yet without some one to withstand, nor any oppression or cruelty some strength did not break through. Take courage, hold up your heart--some one will arise to face even King Philip and his Holy Inquisition."

She could only bend her head and say, "Forgive me, forgive what I have said--"

He raised his hand with a little gesture as if he would check her protestations, then turned away and entered the library.

There, amid the rich furnishings, in the silence, broken only by the call of the pigeons without, he stood thoughtfully, as if he had forgotten what he had come here for; the sunshine, red now as molten gold, flushed the tapestries, the rows of gilded books, the carved walls and ceilings, the bureaus of gleaming Chinese lacquers, the brocade and velvet chairs, and this slender figure of the young man standing erect, frowning, with one hand on his hip and his face strangely sombre for one so young and splendid.

II - The Loyalty Of Lamoral Egmont

Presently he turned and mounted the little step leading to the low gallery which ran round the bookcases that lined the rooms to the height of a man.

The Prince put his hand over the backs of a row of ponderous books in gilt and calf which dealt with the laws and statutes of the Netherlands; then, not finding the particular volume he required, or losing interest in his impulse, he turned away and crossed to a rare bureau of Chinese work, the smooth brick-red lacquer surface of which was heavily encrusted with gold birds and flowers, and there seated himself and stared across the rich room to the garden filled by the warm light of sunset.

His face was very grave, almost weary; his mouth was set tightly, so that the lines of it were strained, and his nostrils slightly distended.

Presently he took from his pocket a little notebook of scented leather and slowly turned over the vellum pages, which were closely covered with numbers and calculations.

It was only lately that the Prince had deigned to take more than the most superficial interest in the management of his vast affairs; he had been too great, too rich, too powerful for any misgivings as to the future. But recently it had been forced on his attention that his fortunes needed mending; his debts were enormous, many of his estates mortgaged; half of his French lordships were not paying their revenues, many others were let at below their value.

For fifteen years, ever since he had had an establishment of his own, he had been spending money like water to maintain a life and a magnificence such as many emperors had not attained; his houses, his horses, his falcons, his kitchens, his entertainments were the most splendid in the land, and famous in Europe, and even his enormous income had felt the strain of such lavishness.

None of his services under Philip had been lucrative; his mission to offer the crown imperial to the new Emperor on the abdication of Charles had been a costly honour, as it had been undertaken at his own expense, and had meant the expenditure of a fortune; his emoluments from his present offices did not touch his outlay, and he was outside that circle of the Regent's favourites (such as the Spanish secretary, Armenteros) who enriched themselves from public funds, nor had he ever received any of the rewards and benefits which had permitted Cardinal Granvelle to retire a rich man.

His second marriage, put through in face of so much opposition and difficulty, had proved a disastrous failure. Anne, unbalanced from the beginning, was now almost a maniac, a disgrace and a humiliation to her proud husband; her dowry had done little more than pay for the wedding festivities, and the alliance with the German Princes, her kinsmen, which William had hoped to create, remained more than doubtful.

There were his brothers--Louis, now sick and at Spa; Adolphus and

Henry, who had just left the college of Louvain--looking to him for advancement, for John, who had set up his household at Dillenburg, was too limited in means to do anything, and there were his own son and the little daughters; responsibilities, burdens, anxieties there were in plenty, and he stood alone to meet them.

Certainly he was at present the most powerful person in the Netherlands, and had been since the fall of Granvelle, but he knew perfectly well that this power was principally rather in outward seeming than in reality, and that his position was more perilous than glorious.

He did not trust Philip; he knew that Monarch hated him, and was only waiting for the opportunity to hurl him down; and he knew Philip hated him because he feared him. Egmont had lately visited Spain, and there had been caressed and flattered and cajoled by the King into forgetting his grievances and those of the country he represented; Montigny and Berghen were ready to accept an invitation to Madrid; Hoorne stood out to trust His Majesty; but William of Orange was not for a moment to be deceived nor cajoled nor lured.

He knew the King.

And he felt a great loneliness in this knowledge, a great sense of standing alone; every one seemed to be either Philip's tool, Philip's puppet, or else utterly deceived by a few sweet words from the royal lips.

It astonished as much as it grieved William that Egmont should be so deceived, that Philip's kindness, Philip's presents, Philip's hospitality should make the envoy of the wrongs of the Netherlands forget his errand, and return praising Philip's charity, Philip's clemency, Philip's generosity.

The thought of Egmont's folly spurred William to his feet.

He walked about the room, frowning, thinking; how was he, the only man who did not fear nor trust Philip, to act now?

Supposing Philip forced the Inquisition and, in the fury of his bigotry, exterminated the Netherlanders in seas of blood and flame?

William stopped short in his pacing to and fro.

"You shall not," he said suddenly, as if he spoke to a living man before him.

And indeed it was not difficult for the Prince to conjure from the dusk the figure once so familiar to him: the meagre form, the pallid face, the mild and blank blue eyes, the projecting lower jaw with the full and tremulous under lip, the yellow-red hair and beard--the figure of the man who, with less brains than the meanest of his clerks, and more bitter insane bigotry than any fanatic devotee, imposed the terror of his rule over half the world.

William could picture him as he had last seen him in the streets of Flushing, the pallid face livid, the lips twisted into a snarl that showed the broken teeth, the foolish blue eyes injected with blood, while he stammered, in answer to the Prince's serene and courteous excuse--"Not the States, but you--you!" using the first person as if he had addressed a servant. William had turned on his heel and left him, not even escorting him as far as the shore where he was to embark.

They had not seen each other since; in spite of his constant promises it did not seem as if Philip would ever set foot in the Netherlands again, and William would have as soon walked into fire as have gone to Spain.

Yet the presence of the King was ever with him, an intangible foe, an all-pervading enemy.

The Prince did not know which of his servants, nay, which of his friends, was secretly in the pay or service of Philip.

But William also had been trained at the Court of Charles V; he had his spies in the Escorial, his agents in Madrid, and he was better informed as to the King's doings than the Regent herself, who was but a puppet in that vast game of triple intrigue and interwoven duplicity, that confusion of lies and counter-lies and manifold deceptions which the Court of Spain called statecraft.

William's thoughts went back to the same point again and again the point that was indeed the centre of his problem--

"If the King forces the edicts against heretics--what to do?"

The final issue of slaughter, torture, emigration, and woe unutterable he saw with vision unconfused; he foresaw, too, the ruin of all the great Flemish nobles who refused to be Philip's executioners.

All Stadtholders, all magistrates, all officials who refused to enforce the King's orders would be dismissed from their offices, probably imprisoned, certainly disgraced; their estates would, of a necessity, share the inevitable ruin of the country; their fortunes would be lost in the general bankruptcy.

So much was obvious; it was obvious also that the only way to escape this ruin would be to submit to Philip, to support his policy, to fulfil his decrees, to obey him in everything with implicit loyalty.

And what was Philip going to demand?--that these noblemen, of as proud a birth as his own, become inquisitors, executioners, the despoilers of their native land or the land whose charters and

liberties they had sworn to protect?

Impatient with his own thoughts and with circumstances William left the library and returned to his cabinet, where two secretaries were working by the light of lamps of red Florentine copper.

William had scarcely entered when Lamoral Egmont was ushered into his presence; the Prince took his friend by the hand and, greeting him pleasantly, led him into the outer chamber, already lit by tall candles in polished brass sticks shining like pale gold.

William had not had so much of the Count's company of late; Egmont was generally in attendance on the Regent, who flattered his vanity by affecting to lean on his advice, and since his return from Madrid he had rather shunned the society of the Prince, for he was a little uneasy, a little ashamed, at the ease with which Philip had lured him from his ancient allegiance to the plans and policy of his friend.

He stood now awkwardly, like a man with something on his mind, his fine and gallant head held rather defiantly high, his handsome features flushed and troubled. The Prince observed him closely, but was silent, waiting for him to speak.

"I have been with the Regent to-day," said Egmont at last; "she commands my assistance in the preparation of these wedding festivities. It becomes wearisome," he added, with some impatience.

The Prince made no comment; he was not very interested either in all these pompous feasts and tourneys which were to celebrate the marriage of the Regent's son (whom Egmont had brought back from Spain with him) and the Princess Maria of Portugal. It was an ill time for this extravagant and lavish rejoicing, and neither bride nor groom pleased the Prince; besides, the memory of his own costly wedding

festivities was still fresh and unpleasantly vivid in his mind.

"The Regent heard to-day from Spain," added Egmont suddenly.

The Prince looked at him sharply.

"Was it an answer to the protest about the decrees of the Council of Trent?" he asked.

"I do not know--she would not make the news public. But I know the tidings were ill, the tears were in her eyes and her breath came short, and on the first excuse she could, she hurried from me and retired to her chamber. And, later, I heard the young Prince, her son, say that if all the heretics were exterminated, God would be well pleased."

"He will be a rod and a scourge, that youth," remarked William. "I never met one with so much pride. So Philip will cut the Netherlander to the measure of the Pope's yardstick?"

"I do not say so," replied Lamoral Egmont hurriedly.

"Nay, but in your heart you know it," returned the Prince. "Now you are away from the seductions of the Escorial you know that Philip is Philip."

The Stadtholder of Flanders winced and flushed.

"I see no cause to mistrust the King's word," he answered obstinately. "He spoke to me graciously with charity and kindness--"

"My poor Lamoral!" exclaimed William with a sarcasm he could not restrain, "and could a little sweetness, the false Spanish honey, so easily lure you into the net? Do you really believe in Philip's caresses, Philip's promises?"

"I have always been loyal," said Egmont. "I have never offended His Majesty."

"You have--we all have," answered William. "Do you think he has forgotten that we forced him to remove Granvelle? Do you think he has forgiven the jest of the livery?"

The Count laughed.

"Why, I have dined at the Regent's table in camlet, doublet, and the device--"

"And she has smiled and flattered. She is Philip's sister," remarked the Prince drily. "Trust none of them. The King is only waiting for his revenge."

Egmont paled a little and looked at William uneasily; he felt himself again coming under the Prince's influence, again affected by the Prince's warning; he began to entertain a horrid doubt: Philip's sincerity, if that was all a snare?--if the King was offended with him beyond appeasement?--his very soul shuddered before that possibility and what it meant.

William saw his hesitancy and spoke again--spoke earnestly and ardently as a man would to save a friend.

"Egmont, believe none of them," he said. "The King loves us not--he has those about him who do not allow him to forget keep out of his power, eschew his flatteries, trust neither him nor his creatures."

But Philip's blandishments were still too fresh in the Count's ears, he was too secure in the consciousness of his own loyalty to give more than a passing heed to any warning, much as he was impressed by the force of the Prince's stronger character. He reassured himself by recalling the Regent's favour, the King's promises of benefits and

rewards; and he was a man hampered with debts, with daughters to dower presently--a man who needed magnificence, splendour, the atmosphere of Courts, a man ductile under the flattery of the great.

"You are too prudent, too cautious," he answered, with a vehemence to cover his momentary hesitation and alarm. "I cannot overstep loyalty--you sail near to defiance of His Majesty's authority."

"If the King forces the Inquisition, what will you do?" asked William suddenly and abruptly.

Egmont flushed and stammered.

"I? I must stand by my duty--it is true these heretics must be outrooted. I am treating them with severity--"

"You will stand by the King," said the Prince briefly.

"What else?" demanded the Count. "I am satisfied His Majesty will not push matters past prudence."

"Do you call it prudence if he insists on measures being forced on the country which will mean every inhabitant being put to the sword or flying overseas?--that will mean the ruin of every trade, every industry, every business?"

"Nay," said Egmont, "the heretics will come back to the true Church."

William smiled at the weakness of this.

"If Philip were to send every soldier he possesses to the Netherlands to force the Inquisition and the decrees of the Council of Trent by the sword, not one of these people would change his faith."

"You speak as one too favourable to heresy," cried the Count.

"I speak as one knowing well these heretics and the power of the faith they hold."

"Would we could extirpate that cursed faith," exclaimed Egmont impatiently, "which, like a foul weed in a fair garden, has brought confusion and misery where there was order and peace!"

"Ah, you are a good Catholic," said William quietly, "and you, too, have tried to put a bridle on men's consciences and whip them to the mass--you have hanged and burned to clear heresy from Flanders--but you will never succeed, Count Egmont, and all your efforts will not save you from King Philip, loyal and pious as you are."

"You, too, are a good Catholic," answered Egmont.

"Ah, yes, I am a good Catholic," replied the Prince indifferently.

He turned aside to snuff the candles that stood on the low table by the heavy carved fireplace.

Egmont was silent; with every moment, with every word, these two, once so inseparably friends and allies, were widening the distance between each other.

It was evident that in the struggle between Philip and William for Egmont, Philip had won; the Stadtholder of Flanders stood firm to Church and King; he had been bought, as Granvelle had always said he could be, by a little flattery, a few promises.

But still the charm and power of the Prince held him, he regretted the old confidence, the old alliance.

"What will Your Highness do?" he asked a little wistfully.

The Prince smiled and, turning towards him, pressed his hand.

"Whatever I do, I think I shall stand alone," he answered. "You will remain my friend though, Lamoral?" he added, and his dark eyes were eloquent with affection.

"Always," replied Egmont. "Come what will, I do not leave my friends so easily, Prince."

"We will talk no more of politics when we are together, and so we shall keep our conversation sweet; the tunes are difficult and bloody, and it is well to forget them," replied William.

They spoke together a while on indifferent topics, their hawks, their hounds, their debts, the last extravagance of Brederode, Montigny's approaching marriage, the arrogance of the young Prince of Parma--Margaret's son--and the severe piety of his bride--the Portuguese Princess.

Only when Egmont was leaving did William refer again to the first topic of their conversation.

"Is Count Hoorne of your mind?" he asked, as he stood with his guest on the great stairs. "About trusting Spain?" he explained.

"Ah yes," said Lamoral Egmont.

"And Hoogstraaten?"

"That--I do not know."

They parted affectionately, and William returned into his palace which, for all the magnificence and luxury and splendour and moving to and fro of servitors, was somehow lonely and desolate.

The Prince mounted the gorgeous stairs slowly, with his eyes downcast; as he gained the first landing he raised them, to see the figure of his wife.

She was going up the stairs before him, half-crouching against the wall and dragging at the tapestries; her heavy handsome skirts trailed loosely after her; her white headcloth was soiled and disarranged; she was sucking a stick of sweetmeat, and her pale flaccid face clouded with an instant expression of dislike and annoyance touched with fear when she observed her husband.

He glanced away, and turned across the landing to his cabinet; she crept on up the stairs, muttering to herself, and looking back at him with a half-snarl like a malignant animal.

So now the Prince and his wife met and passed.

III - The Amusements Of The Princess Of Orange

Duprès--the skryer, alchemist, and religious refugee whom the Prince of Orange was sheltering--had arranged the two chambers allotted to him as half shop, half laboratory, in the fashion of Vanderlinden, the Elector Augustus' alchemist and Duprès' former master.

This fellow, partly charlatan, yet genuinely gifted, and not without a wild flash of genius at times, and real moments of spiritual insight and exaltation, had contrived, by the fascination of the supernatural arts he professed and by his wit and readiness in following the politics and scandals, the rumours and whispers of the hour, to attach to himself a considerable following, both in the Prince's household and among those who came and went in the palace, and

whose visits to the alchemist (as he chose to call himself, though he had little real pretension to any of the honours of hermetic philosophy) were not noticed amid the manifold distractions of the huge establishment.

The Princess of Orange continued Duprès' most ardent patroness and most credulous dupe; she spent hours in his laboratory watching him tell her fortune by means of melted lead, by the markings in the blade bone of a freshly killed sheep, by the arrangement of strange Eastern playing-cards, or in observing the fusing and transformation of various chemicals into powder and essences which Duprès declared were the first steps to the discovery of the Philosopher's Stone.

Anne was hot on this pursuit; the events that shook the Netherlands, the threatened upheaval which might overshadow her husband, the daily torture and death of heretics, the cries arising from the tortured prisoners, the Regent's anxiety and confusion, the enigmatic attitude of the awful Philip--none of these things interested the Lutheran Princess whose father had been so splendid a champion of the Reformed Faith; but to stand over glass retorts and glowing furnaces, to listen to the Frenchman's tedious and learned explanations of matter she could not even begin to understand, to meddle with signs and wonders, to attempt to raise spirits, to experiment with perfumes, dyes, and cosmetics--all this had a deep and irresistible fascination for Anne of Orange.

And Duprès made his full profit thereby, for he obtained from her considerable sums of money, and when she had not these to give, jewels, ornaments, and even costly articles from her chambers. Rénée le Meung had known Duprès at Dresden and then believed him to be a worthless, though cunning creature, and she found it hard to stand by and see him fool the Princess and mock the Prince; but William and all the members of the Nassau family who came and

went in Brussels treated Anne and her doings with magnificent indifference, Duprès was beneath their notice, and it was not in Rénée to play the tale-bearer and carry complaints of her mistress to her master, so she, too, had to spend the dreariest of hours listening to Duprès' jargon and watching his futile experiments, while the sickly smell of perfumes and the acrid odour of chemicals made her head heavy and feverish.

But when the Princess began visiting the laboratory alone, and the whispers and laughter grew among her women, Rénée went through an agony of hot shame and bitter indignation compared to which the dullness of her former life was peace.

Anne was making a jest of herself, and Rénée winced as if she had herself been humiliated, not because of Anne, but because of the name she carried.

Towards this momentous winter, when Brussels was brilliant with the pompous marriage of Alexander of Parma, Anne's women began to openly laugh at their hated mistress.

They had ceased to believe that she went to Duprès' studios solely to study magic and alchemy.

"It is to meet that young lawyer, Jan Rubens," they said, and made a mock of her behind her back.

Rénée, sick of living, sick of loving, weak and pale with watching the ruin of her people and her faith, roused at this.

"The charlatan must go," she said, and all the women laughed again and asked, "Why?" If Anne was quiet with these amusements, why take them from her?

But Rénée repeated, "He must go."

She meant to take the desperate step of frightening the fellow into leaving the palace, and so closing Anne's dangerous means of communication with the outside world.

The Princess of Orange and a Flemish lawyer!--it was impossible that she should stoop so low or he look so high, yet in her heart Rénée did not trust Anne, and meanwhile, if nothing else, she was trampling on her husband's dignity and giving cause for little men to laugh at him.

It was a wild winter day when Anne, in a bitter and stormy mood, had locked herself into her darkened chamber, that Rénée went on her distasteful errand to the alchemist.

Rain was hurled against the palace windows with a force that shook the painted glass in the frames, and lay in great pools beneath the swaying and broken trees and bushes in the garden, until a great gust of wind would come and suck up the water in the hollows and dry the wet lashings on the windows and make the whole great building tremble, then it would die away reluctantly, and another black cloud would burst, drenching all again.

Rénée shuddered in her worn velvet (none of Anne's women went splendidly) as she passed through the magnificent corridors and stairways to the obscure chamber where Duprès lodged.

To her surprise as much as to her relief and satisfaction she found him alone, though she had to use some authority to gain admission from the idle lad who kept his door.

Duprès was in his outer room which opened directly from the antechamber.

He was bending over an alabaster table set on gilt legs, which stood in the corner by the high window, and mixing several brilliant liquids by means of a long silver spoon.

At the sound of Rénée's firm step he turned, and the sight of his face startled her, for he wore a glass mask bound tightly round forehead and chin by strips of black leather.

"Mademoiselle le Meung!" he cried, in tones of surprise and vexation, and, quickly covering his mixtures with silver lids, he took off the mask and looked at her keenly with his bright tired eyes.

"You did not wish to see me," remarked Rénée.

"No," replied Duprès, at once courteous and composed, "you are wrong--no one could have been more welcome, but I am engaged on an important experiment, and told the lad I did not wish to be disturbed."

"Oh, Monsieur Duprès," said Rénée, "do not seek to delude me with these labours of yours--I knew you in Dresden."

He placed a deep-seated leather chair for her in front of the cedarwood fire which emitted a perfumed heat, and he answered calmly--

"You despise me and what I do, but there again you are wrong. If I can make invisible ink, potent sleeping-draughts, swift poisons, keen medicines, and cosmetics to keep women beautiful, am I not of some use in the great affairs of the world?"

"Ah, you suit your argument to your listener," replied Rénée. "Since you cannot dazzle me with your magic and your alchemy you speak straightly, and I am thankful for."

"Blaspheme neither magic nor alchemy," he returned thoughtfully. "All miracles are possible, but our wit is so muddy we may not achieve them. I have talked with angels and glimpsed infinity as certainly as I have been drunk and a cheat."

"Maybe," said Rénée; she sat still, looking round the strange room full of curious pictures and diagrams, planetary signs, shelves of bottles and jars, rows of ancient books and astronomical instruments. She was tired, as always, and, as always, sad in spirit, and she felt that what she had to say was an effort difficult to make.

Duprès came and stood the other side of the wide hearth; his long black gown, his flat velvet cap, the thick gold chain round his neck, his grave, pallid, and wasted face gave him the air of a scholar long closed from the light, but his restless hands and his reckless eyes were those of a man of action.

"You have heard what is taking place in Brussels?" he asked keenly.

"I hear nothing," said Rénée, "but the last scraps of gossip from the pages and servants. I never leave the palace and hardly the Princess's apartments."

"I can tell you this," said Duprès, with an air of lively interest, "that the younger nobles, Brederode, Culemburg, Hoogstraaten, De Hammes, have organized a league against the enforcement of the decrees of the Council of Trent. They had a meeting on the very eve of the Parma wedding. What do you think of that?" he added, smacking his lips. "Does it not look like splendid times ahead—confusion, chances, war, perhaps?"

"Is the Prince in this, or Egmont or Hoorne?" asked Rénée.

"None of those, but the Count Louis—and Egmont's house is as full of

heretics as Geneva, while our dear master is hardly a very good Catholic nor a very good loyalist," he added, with a slight, unpleasant smile.

The waiting-woman flushed and felt her heart beating fast.

"I must come to my errand," she said, "before we are interrupted."

"Yes, your errand," repeated Duprès keenly. "But first, lest we misunderstand one another, are you in the confidence of your mistress?"

"As much as anyone is, perhaps," replied Rénée.

He looked at her searchingly, then his eyes fell; the waiting-woman was conscious of a sudden wave of disgust, of loathing for him and all the pretentious details of this room so obviously arranged to impress the foolish and ignorant, and this feeling gave her strength and courage to speak.

"You must leave the palace, Duprès," she said; "it would be better if you left Brussels, but this you must leave, and at once."

His whole face paled and hardened into a set look of defiance and alarm.

"What do you mean? Who told you to say that?" he asked roughly.

Rénée rose.

"I speak on my own authority," she said quietly, "but if you refuse to take my warning, I will go to the Prince."

Duprès winced so palpably and looked so hideously alarmed that Rénée was slightly astonished, slightly softened.

"Go at once," she added, following up her advantage; "you have made enough plunder and may now try your fortunes elsewhere."

Duprès rallied himself; his eyes flickered to the fire.

"What have you against me?" he asked anxiously.

"You are a plague spot, a fester in this house," answered Rénée. "You seduce the Prince's people with lies and foolishness, you bring those here who have no right to enter these doors."

"The Princess wishes me to stay go to her with these complaints, and hear her answer," cried Duprès, with a sudden snarl.

His words woke Rénée's lurking anger; she flashed from coldness to heat.

"The Prince maintains you, shelters you, saved you not his wife and your gratitude is to pander to her foolishness and drain her of her very jewels by your tricks. And there is worse than that, Duprès, she meets here those whom she should not meet, she degrades herself by consorting with idlers in a charlatan's company. You know this--again I tell you, as a warning, you must go."

"Who gave you authority to talk so boldly?" exclaimed the alchemist in a rage. "If my honoured lady deigns to come here to watch my poor experiments, what is it to you?"

"I will not argue on this theme," returned Rénée. "But if you are not gone within the week it shall be put before His Highness that you bring disgrace and disorder into his house."

A curious expression of dislike, rage, and half-amusement gleamed in the alchemist's narrowed eyes, but Rénée, already hot, agitated,

and half-ashamed of her own errand, her own plain speaking, was turning quickly and resolutely away, when a sudden sound caused her to stop and turn violently towards Duprès.

It was a woman's laugh she heard--a high, shrill, long laugh; it came from the alchemist's inner room, and was unmistakably the laugh of Anne of Orange.

In a flash Rénée remembered the private door from the Princess's apartments which Anne had affected to have locked and hidden under the tapestries, in a flash she recalled the hours Anne had been seemingly enclosed in her chamber--now it was all clear enough.

"So she comes thus," said Rénée, with tears in her eyes, "and you have been the go-between!"

"No one is here--no one," stammered Duprès, but he backed before the door, and he was colourless and quivering.

"She is there, and I will take her away," cried Rénée. "Who is with her--who?"

"Go, go!" implored Duprès; "there is none here but a young wench who serves me. Oh, gods and angels!" he cried in real terror, as Rénée slipped behind him and seized the handle of the door.

She thought he was going to strike her or use his short dagger on her, and she did not care; but the irresolution and the mocking fatalism that were so strongly in this man's character kept him from action.

"There is an end now," he said cynically, and stepped behind the great chair where Rénée had sat.

The waiting-woman opened the door.

The inner room was glowing with a rich firelight which warmed the chilly gleam of the stormy daylight; the round table was set with a lace cloth and all manner of sweets, cakes, fruits, and wines; and before it, on a long couch, sat the Princess of Orange and Jan Rubens, the young lawyer.

One of his arms was round her waist, one of hers round his neck; their flushed faces were pressed together, and they were endeavouring to drink out of the same goblet, a rare thing of rock crystal, in the form of a fish, mounted in rubies and gold.

All this Rénée saw in a breath, and while she saw she realized her own utter failure, the uselessness of all her years of effort, of watchfulness, of endurance, of patience; she had been outwitted like a fool. Anne had eluded her, and gone straight to that shame, that degradation from which Rénée had laboured to save her; not even this service had she been able to render the Prince, and that was the bitterest thought of all.

She stood silent, holding the door open, and the two at the table stopped their foolish laughter and rose. Rubens dropped the goblet; the wine spilt over his crumpled ruff and his violet velvet suit.

"Go to your room, Madame," said Rénée, and spoke as a mistress to a servant.

Anne was too frightened to answer; she shrank together as if she expected to be beaten.

The young lawyer tugged at his sword.

"That fool Duprès--" he kept saying, "that fool Duprès--"

Rénée could see he was half-intoxicated; she turned her back on him

and spoke again to Anne.

"Go, go!" she cried. "Do you realize that you are playing with death?"

This last word seemed to recall Jan Rubens to his senses.

"I am ruined!" he cried. "I have a wife and children. God forgive me! Oh, God forgive me!"

He turned his face away and put his hands before his eyes.

Anne limped towards the door.

"Oh, make haste!" whispered Rénée, through strained lips.

Duprès came forward; he was the most composed of the four, though there was terror in his eyes and his hands shook.

"Mademoiselle will not speak?" he said in a low voice, catching hold of Rénée's sleeve. "A little foolishness, a little indiscretion Mademoiselle would not make mischief for that?"

"A little foolishness," repeated Anne vaguely. She began to weep. "May I not have my amusements? You were always hard, Rénée; do not be hard--"

"See," said Duprès, in a quick, eager whisper. "Keep this from the Prince, and I will go away--*he* will leave Brussels--"

"Make no bargains with me," cried Rénée passionately, exasperated with disdain of the cringing attitude of all of them, by Anne's utter lack of dignity, by the horrid sordidness of the thing she had disclosed, which sickened her as one might be sickened by lifting a smooth stone and discovering beneath a foul reptile. "You will go--all of you--and at once."

The young Fleming now stumbled forward into the outer room. He was a big, clumsy man, fresh-coloured, blonde, fair-bearded, and blue-eyed; his face was grey and distorted with terror; he stood before Rénée shuddering like a lashed hound. She noted, with further contempt for his utter cowardice, that he neither tried to bribe nor threaten her.

"Will it be the rope--the rope?" he asked. "Or would the Prince grant the sword--for my family's sake?"

"Go," cried Rénée, "escape from here like the thing you are!"

She caught Anne's limp hand and dragged her to the door.

"If he kills me," said the Princess sullenly, "he will take a life that is worth nothing to me." She twisted round in Rénée's grasp to throw insult at the two men standing foolishly side by side.

"And you could neither strike a blow nor say a word, tricksters and churls!"

She said nothing more while Rénée led her back through the palace until they came to the great staircase window which looked on the courtyard.

A cavalcade, muffled against the weather, was leaving the palace gates.

"My husband going to the Council," muttered Anne. "My husband!"

When they reached the Princess's apartments, Rénée locked the secret door and took away the key.

Anne watched from where she crouched over the fire.

"I suppose you despise me, hate me now?" she asked.

Rénée turned her beautiful haggard face towards her mistress, and for the first time in her long bondage she spoke what had ever been in her heart.

"I always despised and hated you," she said.

"I knew it," answered Anne apathetically, and sat silent over the warmth of the flames till she fell heavily asleep.

But the waiting-woman paced her little chamber in agonies of torment, weeping unbearably bitter tears of pain and shame and unavailing regret.

IV - PHILIP'S MANDATE

William of Orange rode up to the beautiful Brabant palace in company with Egmont, who had been dining with him, and several gentlemen who were in attendance on both the noblemen.

Egmont was silent, uneasy, almost sullen; he felt that Philip was not carrying out the golden promises he had made in Madrid, and that he had been more or less deceived and cajoled; and though his loyalty was not shaken, he was humiliated at appearing as a man of straw in the eyes of William of Orange.

The Prince too was uneasy. He knew, by means of secret information, that the Regent had received dispatches from the King during her son's marriage festivities, and had kept them concealed. He did not think this seemed as if they contained good news; he saw everything very gloomy and black ahead, very troubled and difficult, but at least he hoped that the King had taken up some definite attitude. To a man of William's temperament, Philip's endless

irresolution, interminable delays, shifty evasions, blank silences, and long inaction were the most unbearable of policies.

They reached the palace wet with rain and blown with wind, to find most of the other members of the Council there before them, and already gathered in the presence of the Regent in the splendid council chamber of the ancient Dukes of Brabant.

Baron de Barlaymont, the last representative of the fallen party of Granvelle, was there seated humbly in his usual quiet corner, where he was seldom noticed and seldom spoke. His colleague Vigilius, President of the Privy Council, was also present; he had but recently recovered from an almost mortal illness which had seized him while preparing an answer to the Prince of Orange's speech against the Inquisition and the corruption of the Court, and had been left by it almost useless, almost senseless.

Thomas Armenteros, Margaret's Spanish secretary, was there, and Admiral Hoorne, gloomy and sad.

The Duke of Aerschot, the one noble who had unflinchingly supported all Philip's measures, and the Sieur de Glayon, completed, with the arrival of the Prince and Egmont, the members of the Council of State; but the ancient and feeble Vigilius was supported by several of the learned doctors of law who composed the board of the Privy Council of which he was President.

The Regent sat in her usual place at the head of the long table, working nervously at the usual length of embroidery which served to give employment to her restless fingers.

She had aged of late; her face had hardened, and there were strands of white in her thick, heavy hair. The firm set of her powerful jaw and her majestic deportment gave her a resemblance to the

Emperor her father, but her eyes were the eyes of a woman overwhelmed and frightened.

When all the councillors were seated, she dropped her work on to her lap and looked keenly and anxiously from one face to another the dark, handsome face of Orange; the old, feeble face of Vigilius; the downcast, bitter face of Barlaymont; the beautiful, uneasy face of Egmont; the brooding, sullen face of Hoorne; and the sleek, smiling face of Armenteros, the secretary, who held the dispatches in his hand.

Margaret spoke; her shaking voice was rendered half inaudible by the sound of the rain beating on the leaded casements where glowed the arms of Brabant, and the wind struggling with the heavy window-frames.

William rested his hands on the soft Persian cloth that covered the council table, and he, in his turn, looked steadily at the Regent.

But he was not considering, nor reckoning with, Madame Parma; behind the figure of this confused, agitated woman, whose task was too great for her wits, William saw the real master, the pale King going to and fro his masses and his cell in the Escorial, from whence he directed the destinies of the Netherlands.

"You shall hear the Royal commands, seigneurs," finished the Duchess, and she glanced at those two fine shapely hands of William of Orange resting on the cloth in front of him, and her look of fright deepened as if they had held a bared sword towards her breast.

"Read, read," she cried to Armenteros, in great agitation. She caught up her work, but tears were in her eyes, and she could not see the stitches.

The secretary rose. He was a mere clerk, but since Granville's downfall he had grown fat on the spoils of the corruption of the Court, and now affected the great lord; he was dressed in the Spanish style, close doublet and short cloak in plain black velvet which disdained the French and Flemish finery of button, lace, and feather, and wore a great ruff of wired cambric so stiff that he could not turn his head.

He bowed, but formally, to the councillors, and announced that the present dispatches had been received a few days before the Parma wedding, had been placed before the Privy Council and by that body reported upon, which report would be read after the Royal commands.

Hoorne glanced at Orange, Egmont kept his eyes down, Vigilius seemed scarcely less agitated than the Regent; he shook as if slightly palsied, and the water stood in his eyes.

Armenteros read the dispatches in a high-pitched clear voice, which rose above the outer tumult of the wind and rain; his dark, precise figure showed clear-cut in the grey winter light against the dark panelled walls of the council chamber.

Philip's dispatches were prolix as always, but this time they were neither obscure nor irresolute nor enigmatical. The King had hesitated long, but now he was resolved, and he spoke out his resolution with no uncertain words.

The decrees of the Council of Trent were to be enforced with full rigour, the Inquisition was to be given full power and authority, all the placards and edicts against heretics issued by the late Emperor were to be enforced, such heretics as were at present in confinement awaiting judgment were to be at once executed.

In brief, the ancient religion was to be re-established by sword and

fire and faggot, by fine, by banishment, by ruin; if need be, by the extermination of a whole people.

There was to be no further temporizing, no appeal; the secular judges were commanded to give all possible assistance to the Inquisitors, and the Stadtholders were abjured to protect them; all loyal subjects of the King were to assist him in his ardent desire to uproot heresy, or to be reckoned among those they protected.

The passionate sincerity of the writer, "who would rather die a hundred deaths than be the lord of heretics," illumined the diffuse and rambling letter as a flame does darkness; the fierceness and force of this tremendous decision was a mighty thing, the power of one overmastering passion giving to a little man the semblance, the terror of greatness.

When the secretary folded up the letter and sat down, a sound like a sob went through the room; then bitter protest, like a cry of despair, broke from the pale lips of Egmont.

"This is not what His Majesty told me, this is not what was promised--before God it is not!"

"His Majesty has written to you, Count," said Margaret hurriedly.

"Yes," admitted Egmont, "and the written words were different enough from the spoken ones; yet I hoped--I still hoped--Ah!" he broke out again passionately, "by Christ, I hoped for something better than this!"

So had Margaret; the emphatic severity of the King's mandate, the now obvious hopelessness of his ever coming in person to the Netherlands, the ruin ahead of the whole country if the Royal orders were obeyed these things had kept Madame Parma from rest and

ease ever since she had first read the fatal dispatches; and now her doubt, fear, and vexation were beyond concealment.

Hoorne spoke now; he was not given to many words, and his speech was commonly to the point.

"What do you intend to do, Madame?" he asked grimly, and his usual disdain of women was heightened by the sight of Margaret's obvious weakness.

"His Majesty must be obeyed," said Barlaymont and Aerschot almost in a breath; Vigilius and the secretary murmured an assent; only William of Orange remained silent, still looking down at his peaceful hands folded on the edge of the table.

"Read the comments of the Privy Council," said the Regent desperately; and the secretary rose again, and in his clear, expressionless voice read out the tedious report of the Privy Council, which merely amounted to a strong recommendation to the State Council to endorse the Royal commands. When he had finished a passionate murmur broke from Hoorne and Egmont.

"What can I do?" asked Margaret, answering them before they spoke. "I have made all representations to His Majesty I have told him the state of the country, your own protests. You, Count Egmont, have yourself been to Madrid and laid the case of the Netherlands before His Majesty."

"I will undertake no such mission again!" cried the Stadtholder of Flanders stormily.

"It were wise not to," said the Seigneur de Glayon, with meaning.

"What is to be done?" asked Margaret weakly, and she looked at Armenteros, the man on whom she had learnt to rely, and he in his

turn gazed at the rain-splashed panes of the tall window at his side,

William of Orange spoke for the first time since he had entered the council room.

"There is nothing to be done," he said, "but to obey the mandate of the King."

They all looked at him, half in terror, half in relief, Egmont almost incredulously.

"You!" he exclaimed. "You who were ever so hot against the Inquisition, against religious oppression--you who would leave the very weavers and labourers free to choose their faith?"

"What I have said I maintain--I think you know, Count Egmont, that I maintain my words--but I have said already, at this very Board, all I can say. And now the King's attitude is clear, his commands are definite, his wishes unmistakable--let them be fulfilled."

So saying, the Prince turned his dark eyes on Margaret, and there was an expression of challenge, of reserved strength and judgment in them that caused the Regent to feel doubtful of the support William so calmly offered.

"To obey is to put a match to straw," she said in real terror, "but to refuse is impossible."

"Ay, impossible," said William. He pointed to the dispatches lying before Armenteros on the many-coloured cloth. "There is Philip's mandate. Let it be obeyed."

"We have no excuse to disobey," admitted Hoorne sourly. "But what will the Netherlander do?"

"What will any of us do?" smiled William. "Let His Majesty's wishes be put in force, and then it will be seen what all will do."

These words seemed to further frighten Margaret, who had always been in awe of the powerful Prince of Orange.

"I count on Your Highness to support me in these troubles," she said anxiously, and her tired eyes, full of tears, fixed searchingly on William's serene and inscrutable face.

He slightly bowed his head, without replying; Egmont traced the lines of a yellow tulip in the pattern of the cloth with his forefinger; Hoorne stared desolately in front of him; Aerschot, Glayon, Barlaymont appeared amazed and frightened; an air of gloom, of foreboding, of dismay rested on all. With the exception of the Prince of Orange, all seemed like men confused.

Margaret turned desperately to the secretary: "The edicts and placards of the Inquisition, the decrees of the Council of Trent, must be published in every village, immediately--"

Then Vigilius rose. He had been one of Granvelle's hottest partisans, one of the sternest upholders of the Inquisition, one of the most uncompromising believers in the extermination of the heretics; but now that the fiat had gone forth, now that the die was finally cast, he was afraid--afraid of a whole nation driven to the extreme of agony and despair.

In a long, confused, and wearisome speech he feebly spoke for delay, for compromise, for the avoidance of scandal and riot; in general, for further evasion of that final issue which Philip had suddenly forced.

He shook with age and sickness, his hands beat the air with palsied

movements, he altered and retracted his words--the burden of his speech was fear, fear and terror obvious in every sentence.

When he at last sat down, wiping the tears from his eyes, the other councillors moved impatiently. All felt that the moment had come; the sword so long suspended over the Netherlands had fallen, and further procrastination was useless.

"The matter is now between the King and the people," said the Prince of Orange. "Put before them the King's commands--and hear their answer."

Again Margaret trembled to hear him speak; her blurred eyes strove to pierce the fast-encroaching winter dusk that was descending on the council chamber, so that she might read his expression.

"His Highness is right," said Egmont. "The placards and edicts must be issued."

"I see us all ruined," muttered Hoorne, tugging at his black beard, "but we must obey."

All agreed; no one supported Vigilius, who sat shaking in his chair, counselling "a little delay--a little delay."

"You have resigned, learned President," William answered him. "Before this storm breaks, you may be safely in shelter."

"Methinks this will be a storm from which there will be no shelter," murmured the old man.

"Speak encouraging words, or hold your peace, good sir," cried Margaret distractedly; and turning to Armenteros she gave the orders for the enforcement of the edicts and placards.

No one noticed the increasing darkness, which now almost prevented them seeing each other's faces; no one heard the sound and wrath of the storm without, the whirling of the waters, the combat of the winds. All were listening to the scratching of the Spaniard's quill while he took down the instructions which were practically the death-warrants of a whole nation; all watched him as he leant sideways to catch the light--him, and the white blur of the paper over which his quill was moving.

At length it was done; the Regent bent from her chair, took the pen, and blindly signed.

William of Orange drew a great breath.

"Now we shall see the beginning of the most terrible tragedy the world has known!" he whispered to Hoorne, and his tone was almost one of exultation, the tone of a man who sees his enemy face to face, out in the open, at last.

The Admiral crossed himself in silence; Egmont gave a passionate ejaculation; the rest were dumb and motionless in the darkness.

And so the thing was done, and Philip's mandate obeyed.

Margaret rose and called for candles; Armenteros put up his papers; the councillors got to their feet.

Severally they took leave of the Regent; when the first candles were brought in, William of Orange was at her side, and she saw his face, pale and extraordinarily aglow with some inner emotion.

He took his leave with no added word, and she could find none with which to detain him, though she longed to try and test him.

He was on the palace steps with Lamoral Egmont at his side; they

paused a second watching the loose, fiercely driven clouds flying over the seven churches and proud palaces of Brussels, the long broken lances of the rain dashing on shining wet roof and spire.

"Tis the Angel of Death riding the whirlwind the clouds of havoc gather from the four corners of the earth," said the Prince. "God send us a good deliverance."

V - THE KNIGHT-ERRANT

AS the Prince of Orange returned to his palace he passed a mansion which defied the stormy night with light and music, and from the great doors, which emitted rays of rose and gold on to the bitter rain, a band of young cavaliers came forth, mounted, and turned their several ways, with joyous farewells to each other.

William recognized the persons and voices of several--Brederode, Hoogstraaten, Culemburg, Nicolas de Hammes, commonly called Golden Fleece, and his own brother Louis, who was newly come to Brussels.

The Prince reined up his wet and steaming horse and waited for the Count, who bared his head to the rain at sight of his brother.

"From the Council?" he asked, as he brought his horse alongside his brother.

"Yes," said William briefly, and neither spoke again as, bending before the weather, they made their way to the Nassau palace.

For once the Prince did not appear at the almost public table he kept, but dined alone with Louis in his private apartments.

The princely chamber was warmly lit by the yellow glow of fair wax

candles; the gaytapestries, the heavy furniture gleamed with gold; among the crystal and lace of the dining-table gold shone too, and in the brocade of the chairs and in the great heart of the fire burning behind the sparkling brass and irons on the wide brick hearth.

In the magnificence of their persons the two young men were worthy of the gorgeous setting. The tawny velvet and violet silk of the Prince's attire was drawn and purpled with gold, the triple ruff that framed his dark face as high as the close waves of hair above the small ears was edged with gold lace, gold flashed again in the chain which was twisted in heavy links round and round his neck.

Louis wore black satin cut over yellow velvet and a falling ruff of Malines lace; his fair and charming face was as fresh as a flower, his eyes flashed as brightly as any gold in the room, and the ruby clasps fastening his doublet rose and fell with his eager and impatient breaths.

William usually ate with a hearty appetite, and enjoyed the luxurious pleasure of a richly set meal; but to-night he let the courses pass almost untouched, and broke the pieces upon his plate and left them.

Neither did he speak much, though it was not his habit to be taciturn. After he had given his brother a brief account of the momentous Council he was silent.

But Louis glowed with swift anger and boundless enthusiasm.

"We have not been idle," he declared. "The festivities, the weddings of Parma and Montigny, have been a fair pretext for our meetings. We have already a league among ourselves."

"I know something of that," answered William. "It will be as dangerous a matter as Egmont's livery."

"Do you bid me hold back--now?" cried Louis impetuously.

"I bid no man hold back," replied the Prince quietly. "Who are with you in this design?"

"Brederode, Ste Aldegonde, Culemburg, Hoogstraaten, de Hammes, Montigny--all the younger nobility--"

"Montigny!" said William softly, "and he has just taken a wife."

"Is she not a beautiful creature?" answered Louis. "Half of those who jousted before her would have given half their rents to win Hélène d'Espinoy. Montigny loves his wife," he added, in a lower voice. "Did you not notice it at the jousts?"

"I hope he will not go to Madrid," remarked William. "I hear that he and Berghen think of undertaking an embassy to Philip."

"Egmont--will he not go again?" asked Louis.

"No--he is still sore at the success of his last mission."

The Prince rose and crossed to the hearth, resting his elbow against the chimney-side and his face in his hand.

Louis, still seated at the table, glanced at his brother wistfully.

"You take my news coldly," he said in a tone of disappointment. "I thought that you would be rejoiced to hear that there was this league to protect the rights of the nobles and the liberties of the people."

"It was no news to me," answered William. "I knew your designs. You are all young and ardent and reckless--God keep you all."

Louis bit his lip and drank the last drop of yellow wine that lay like

liquid amber in his sparkling crystal glass.

"We do what we can," he said, with great emotion, "and none but a coward would do less at such a time as this."

William was silent; his face was turned away from his brother and his shoulders drooped a little.

The young Count flushed all over his sensitive face at what he thought the Prince's disapproval.

He rose and stood before the brilliant disorder of the dining-table in the attitude of a man justifying himself.

His ardent gaiety had gone; he was passionately grave, passionately in earnest.

"If Your Highness will not support me in what I do, I must go on alone. I too am one of these doomed people, I too am a heretic. I am one of those whom the Church and Philip have thrice cursed, thrice damned; and every poor artisan whose flesh smokes above the market-place, and every wandering preacher who is tortured to death, is my brother in God. I cannot speak of these things without tears. We may tourney and dance and feast, but the nation is bleeding to death from a thousand wounds, and I cannot go on in my own easy safety--"

"It is not your country, Louis, nor your quarrel."

"Yes, it is my quarrel," returned the young Count eagerly, "because I too am a heretic. This cause I espouse, to this quarrel I devote myself."

"You are knight-errant," said the Prince.

Louis flushed again.

"No, I am nothing but a poor soldier, as which I shall live and die."

William suddenly moved so as to face him.

"How far will you go?" he demanded.

"As far as any."

"Would you take up arms against the King?"

"With all my heart and, I think, God's blessing," answered the young man gravely. "If Egmont should lead a rising against the King--"

"Egmont!" said William quickly. "Egmont never will--Egmont is a good Catholic. Egmont is loyal to Philip."

"Even now?"

"Even now he is not the man of this moment."

"Brederode will lead us, then," replied Louis.

"Brederode is reckless, imprudent--"

"He is popular, loyal, brave. Then there is Ste Aldegonde--"

"Another fiery spirit a poet, too!"

"Culemburg, then De Hammes."

"Too low in rank--you yourself are better suited than any of these."

Louis replied soberly--

"If I am called, I am willing to serve to the death."

"I know," said William, "I know."

Louis stood doubtful, distressed, his brown fingers pulling nervously at the edge of the fine tablecloth.

"Would you not be willing for me to take this charge upon myself?" he asked earnestly and imploringly.

The Prince did not reply; his face seemed drained of blood beneath the brown skin, his dark eyes were black with the dilation of the pupils.

"And you, you?" urged Louis. "What will you do? Bow the neck to Philip?"

He moved away from the table, crushing his hands together.

William turned now and spoke; he made an effort with his words. Choosing them carefully, arranging them exactly, often faltering in the endeavour to force his wide and far-reaching thoughts into speech; in all he said was great patience, great sincerity, great gentleness.

"You must not think me cold. Indeed I am not cold. I know Spain and Philip better than you--better than your friends. I know his power, his resources, his persistency--above all his power! 'Tis the King of half the world. And now he has spoken, he will not go back from his word. Do you think the Regent will long serve his turn? Before this present crisis she will fail utterly. A dull woman. Philip will send Alva and an army--the finest army in the world, Louis. It was Alva who advised this stern decree. I know that--a great soldier, the Duke of Alva, a loyal Catholic--he will come. Nothing will stop Philip now. No laws, no charters, no promises--he has condemned to death the Netherlands, and he will not fail to send the executioner."

Louis listened intently, one hand pressing the ruby buttons on his breast, his eyes eagerly on his brother's face.

"I have been like a watchman over this land since King Henry spoke to me in Vincennes wood. I have seen havoc and ruin and desolation coming nearer and nearer," continued the Prince mournfully; "I see it very near now. I see this country overwhelmed as if the dikes had been cut down and the sea were rushing in--a flood no man can withstand--and do you think I wish to see all I love dash forward vainly, to be swept away by the first wave of this deluge? Ah, Louis," he added, in a tone of anguish, "what is your defiance against Philip's might--what are all the gentlemen of Flanders against Alva's army? But a stone in the way to be flung aside and forgotten."

"Are we, then, to submit?" asked Louis in a low voice.

The Prince took a restless turn about the room.

"Philip is not to be defeated by knight-errantry, but by subtle ways, like to his own--by policy, by patience, by long years of endeavour and waiting. He is not to be met openly in the field, but snared in secret places."

"Meanwhile, we shall grow old and palsied," cried Louis, "and all the hot blood in us will go for nothing."

"You see the glory of the combat, I see the anguish of the defeat," said William slowly. "You remember the skryer in Leipsic? How he saw the future in the crystal--and the end, all blood and blackness? To me too it seems like that--darkness ahead and death--the sacrifice of all our house."

"Speak words of good import," cried the Count. "Why should God

utterly forsake us? Will He not set high the standard of the good cause?"

William looked at him thoughtfully.

"Yea, if one gave all one had, if one suffered and waited, if one sacrificed--all--for what one dared to think the right, perhaps God might help one--God! But doth He help, or rather leave us to depend on our own poor energies?"

Louis was startled by the emotion in his brother's voice, by the look of his pallid face on which the dews of anguish had started.

"What do you mean? What will you do?"

"I do not know," said William. "I do not know. I say I see it all dark ahead--last night the stars were red and flashing through the blackness of hideous clouds, and methought it needed no great fancy to believe these tales of spectral battalions who nightly combat in the skies and rain blood upon the earth. Two days ago at Leyden the sentries felt warm blood upon their hands and heard the shouts of battle overhead."

Louis shuddered.

"At Utrecht and Haarlem they saw armed men fighting in the air," he answered; "one told the very pattern of the flint-locks and the manner of caps they wore."

"I would consult my skryer," smiled William sadly, "but the strange rogue has left me on the sudden. And we need no skryer to warn us of what is before us, and no portents in the air to prepare us."

"And I, what must I do?" asked Louis, with a noble and winning deference to the other.

"Wait," replied the Prince. "Wait--persuade the others to do so too. Put no other check upon yourselves but prudence--be secret, take only those on whom you can rely into your League--watch Ste Aldegonde, Brederode, and de Hammes; they are too reckless--do not trust Charles Mansfeld--rely on Hoogstraaten and Culemburg--Ah, what can I say!" He passionately caught the young Count by the shoulders. "I leave it to your own heart, your own judgment; but remember that you will be needed, do not fling yourself away."

"Princely brother," answered Louis, and the tears stood in his eyes, "I am always at your service, and only ask leave to die at your feet."

William kissed him on the brow, then releasing him, drew from the gilded pocket that hung at his own waist a curious iron ring set with a large opal the colour of milk, and holding blood and fire in the heart.

"Wear this," said the Prince. "It is an Eastern talisman which shall protect you from evil."

Louis slipped it on his signet finger.

"When another than myself brings you this, you will know that I am dead," he smiled.

"God grant that I may never see it save on your hand!" exclaimed the Prince. "And now I give you leave to go--you are due at Hoogstraaten's supper?"

"Yes; will you not come?"

"Not to-night--my duty to all. Until to-morrow, adieu."

They touched hands again, and each looked at the other with a certain wistfulness, as if their hearts were full of a yearning affection

they did not dare express.

When Louis had gone William returned to the fire, which was falling into ashes at the edges.

Of all the conversation with his brother one phrase suddenly leapt to his mind unbidden; he seemed to read it in the dying heart of the flame--

"Montigny loves his wife."

The four words gave the Prince a strange pang in the remembrance; he crossed the room and looked at a little painting of Anna van Buren, the first Princess of Orange, which hung on the opposite wall.

The pale prim face, her gentle eyes, her drooping mouth, the very dress she wore, and the jewel round her neck which he had given--he recalled her so clearly--even as she was painted now--yet how remote she was; she had made no impression on his life, and he never thought of her now save as he might think of some playmate of his youth--for they had been married at seventeen, and she had died almost before he had reached full manhood; but she had been to him what the wives of most great nobles were to their husbands--a little more than the wives of Hoorne and Brederode were to them, a little less than Egmont's wife was to him. In the misery and humiliation of his present marriage he could recall her gratefully.

But love--"Montigny loves his wife"--the words came again to him like the echo in a shell held to the ear/and sounded sadly in the loneliness of the Prince's heart. "If a man had great difficulties and a hard and toilsome task, a loving wife would be a marvellous comfort," he thought. Then he laughed at his own fancies. "A man must not depend on women. There are things to be done in which no woman can help."

He went to the window, opened the shutters and looked out upon the storm.

The rain had ceased, and the bitter winds were tearing the black clouds apart and hurling them across the heavens; the curled thread of the new moon glimpsed here and there amid the vapours like a frail barque amid the wreckage of a hideous sea.

The fair fields of Brabant and the proud gay town of Brussels were blotted out in the darkness, but a faint strain of melody rose fitfully on the winds: it was the carillon from some hidden clock tower.

William of Orange stood silent, holding the window casement open with either hand and listening to the storm that for him held the sound of gathering armies, the tramp of feet, the galloping of horses, the flapping of banners straining at their poles the coming of great multitudes onrushing in the agony and the exultation of supreme conflict.

VI - THE EDICTS

Throughout the Netherlands the Inquisition was again formally and officially proclaimed; it was answered by a cry of passionate wrath and hate, and bitter despair and agony, intense enough to have reached Philip in the cells of the Escorial.

Foreign merchants and workers fled, houses of business were shut up, shops closed, banks ruined; commerce--nay, the ordinary business of life--was almost suspended; whole districts emigrated, abandoning their work and their property. In a short time famine threatened, riots broke out, and the daily barbarous executions were scenes of frantic rage on the part of the maddened population which the officers of the Crown sometimes found it difficult or impossible to

repress; more than once the victims were rescued from the very stake.

Brabant hotly protested that the introduction of the Inquisition was illegal and expressly against the distinct provisions of "the joyous entry," and the four principal cities came forward with a petition to Margaret which she could not ignore. The matter was referred to the Council of Brabant; even the creatures of the Government had to admit that no ecclesiastical tribunal had ever been allowed jurisdiction in Brabant, and the great province was declared free of the Inquisition with the result that it was soon overcrowded with desperate refugees from all other parts of the ravaged Netherlands.

Pasquils, lampoons, open letters issued by the thousand from the secret presses, and every morning saw fresh ones pasted on the gates of the great nobles in Brussels. Egmont and Orange, as the most powerful and most popular nobles, were passionately called upon to come forward and protect the country.

Nor did these people--middle-class artisans, weavers, tanners, dyers, printers, carvers, merchants, shop-keepers, farmers, all the great mass of the population, the industrious, sober, quiet men who were slowly building up the prosperity of the country--lack for generous championship, even from those nobles who were Catholics.

Baron Montigny, in the first flush of his joyous marriage, the Marquis Berghen, who had always been unflinching in his refusal to acknowledge the Inquisition, the younger Mansfield, refused to enforce the Edicts within their provinces.

Egmont lent his authority to the work of persecution in Flanders, but Orange declined to support the Inquisition within his Stadtholderships.

Meanwhile Louis of Nassau was consolidating the famous Compromise or League of which he and Ste Aldegonde had laid the foundations during their meeting at Spa, and which had been joined by a considerable number of the younger nobility; while Hoorne and Orange, Hoogstraaten and Montigny, had been jousting in the lists at the Chateau d'Antoine before the beautiful bride, Hélène d'Espinoy, Louis and Ste Aldegonde were going from tent to tent, from cavalier to cavalier, laughing, jesting, and secretly obtaining promises of signatures to the Compromise, which consisted of a vow to resist "the tyranny of foreigners, and especially the Holy Inquisition, as contrary to all laws human and divine, and the mother of all iniquity and disorder."

By early in the new year, the energies of Louis and Ste Aldegonde, both of whom had been active during the extravagant marriage feasts of the proud Parma Prince, had secured over two thousand signatures from the younger nobility.

The great nobles and Stadtholders they did not attempt to approach; the secret Compromise, being so zealously passed from one eager young hand to another, was scarcely a document anyone in authority could sign.

But Montigny and Berghen knew of the League, and were prepared to protect the members; the Prince of Orange, if he did not openly encourage, at least made no effort to check the ardent labours of his brother.

The full details of the scheme, nor the heights of daring to which the covenanters had gone, were not disclosed to him; Louis feared the disapproval of the Prince's wise patience, and the other young nobles were even doubtful as to which side His Highness would ultimately espouse, so delicately did his discretion hold the balance,

so completely was every one in the dark as to his final intentions.

On the very day of the Parma wedding, while the princely couple were being united with the full magnificence of the rites of the Catholic Church, twenty gentlemen of the Reformed Faith gathered in the house of Count Culemburg on the horse market and listened to the preaching of a famous Huguenot, Francis Junius, the pastor of a secret congregation at Antwerp. This man, young, brave, eloquent, already in hiding, combined with Louis of Nassau to draw up a petition or protest to the Government on the ever-important subject of the Edicts.

So came in the first stormy months of the year 1566.

The price of grain rose to hitherto unheard-of figures, for the ground was untilled, the harvests unsown; all business with foreign lands was at a standstill, for no stranger would venture into a country which lay under such a ban, nor trust their goods in Dutch ports. Industry was paralysed; the great busy cities, formerly some of the finest and busiest in the world, were silent, deserted, and desolate under the monstrous tyranny which had overwhelmed them.

The Inquisitors-General, De Bay and Tiletanus, had received personal letters of encouragement from the King; Peter Titelmann too received the Royal praise; and the three continued their work of horror and terror, agony and blood.

Towards the beginning of the year Berghen resigned his posts, pleading his inability to obey His Majesty in the matter of religion; Meghem soon followed his example; Egmont lamented that he had not resigned all his offices when in Spain—"As he would have done," he declared, "had he known what His Majesty's intentions were."

He, however, maintained his official position, and continued to

behave with severity against the heretics in Flanders; so he vacillated, pleasing neither the nobles nor the Regent, neither of whom dared rely on him.

William addressed a letter of remonstrance and protest to the Duchess, plainly avowing his views, pointing to the state of the land, and condemning the policy of the King.

Margaret, in despair, wrote to Philip, putting all these things before him, and beseeching him to reconsider the decision with regard to the Inquisition.

Philip did not answer, and William of Orange, who did not lack spies in Madrid, knew why: the King was preparing the levies with which Alva was to try his hand at bringing the rebellious Netherlands to subjection.

But if Philip was making busy preparations in secret, William was not inactive; still hoping by calm and patience to avert the worst of the disaster that still threatened the arrival, namely, of Alva's army he summoned a meeting of the nobles and grandees at Breda, and in a series of conferences, disguised as hunting parties, endeavoured to bring all to concur in some reasonable petition to be presented to the Regent, the main scope of which was to be an appeal for the convocation of the States-General.

But this project was too daring for the loyal nobles and too quiet for the leaguers; the conferences ended with no result, save that of sending Meghem, alarmed and disgusted by the violence of the younger nobles, definitely over to the side of the Government.

Indeed, soon after Meghem announced to Margaret his discovery of a widespread conspiracy among the heretics, who were ready, he declared, to the number of thirty-five thousand armed men to march

against Brussels, and he placed before the Regent a copy of the Compromise.

These extravagant statements were supported by Egmont, who declared that there were great tumults preparing among the heretics, and that the Government must act without delay.

The alarm of the Regent was intense and was scarcely soothed by the Prince of Orange's calm recital of the sober truth--namely, that a great number of nobles and gentlemen were coming to Brussels to lay a petition or request at the feet of the Regent.

Meeting after meeting of councillors, of grandees, of Knights of the Golden Fleece, were now held, while the question was hotly argued whether or no the covenanters were to be suffered to present their petition--the Prince of Orange claiming that they were entitled to all respect; Meghem, Aremberg, and Barlaymont insisting that the palace doors should be closed in their faces. The case grew so desperate that the Duchess proposed to fly to Mons, and was only with difficulty persuaded to hold her post.

As to the petitioners, it was decided they should be admitted, but unarmed; the guards at the city gates being strengthened to prevent any armed followers gaining the entrance to the city.

Brussels ran mad with joy at this concession; it was almost as if the Inquisition had been abolished.

Margaret of Parma, sick with agitation and dread, shut herself up in her chamber and wept by the hour together. To her brother she wrote that the time had now come to either use force or withdraw the Inquisition and the Edicts. Philip, intent on gathering together Alva's army, kept his sister in an agony of suspense, and neither let her know that her successor was already preparing to take her place,

nor that he had finally decided to crush the Netherlands under the weight of the secular sword, since the spiritual authority of the Inquisition had failed.

All through the tumultuous, anxious days, March sweetening into April, Rénée le Meung watched the comings and goings of the Prince from the window of her high little chamber.

Early in the morning she would be awake and watching till the hour when he rode forth. Well she came to know that early view of Brussels wrapt in the blue haze of morning with the gleam of the faint spring sun on the twin towers of Ste Gudule; well did she come to know the figure of the man she watched for, his way of sitting the saddle, the trick of throwing his cloak, the fashion of touching up his horse as he passed the gates.

Sometimes he did not come before she was called to her duties, and the vigil would have been in vain; sometimes she was not able to get back to her post before he returned; but there was hardly a day passed that she did not contrive to see him once--if it was only that distant glimpse.

She had not spoken to him since he had caught the pigeon for her, and her days were now entirely occupied with Anne, whose melancholy and fury daily increased. Since Duprès and all appertaining to him had left the palace, the Princess hated Rénée with a bitter, cowering hate that sometimes cringed and sometimes threatened and sometimes railed, and at all times made life a torment for the waiting-woman--a torment which was only endurable because of those moments when she could escape to her room, and perhaps also because of some inner and consoling conviction that she was standing at the post of duty, and that perhaps in the great events, the terrible events so rapidly shaping, she too might take a not unworthy part.

The very spring itself seemed sad that year; the green on the trees, the violets and daffodils in the Prince's gardens brought no joyousness with them; the low winds were laden with melancholy; the long pale days, the chill nights, the cloudless sunsets, the cold dawns held no comfort nor cheer.

In Rénée's mind, as in the mind of every other man and woman of the Netherlands, was the thought of the fires in the market-places, of the daily hideous executions, of the cries of agony and despair, bereavement and madness rising from every town, from every village; of the exiles fleeing to England, carrying with them their skill, their knowledge, which was the wealth of the nation; of broken fields and unsown harvests, of children starving and lamenting in the streets. She thought of the great, magnificent churches all over the land, where every day costly and solemn ritual was performed, and where in the grave, rich gloom of sanctified beauty, gorgeous music, gorgeous vestures, the loveliness of art, the splendour of texture, marble, silk, tapestry, coloured glass, crystal, gold, jewels were all dedicated to the service of the God to Whom were sent up the flames of the living torches which lit the marketplace, to Whom was offered the blood of maids and boys, mothers and children who had no sin beyond their steadfastness to the Truth as they believed it.

"And still He makes no sign," thought Rénée. "And still He sends none--angel nor man--to smite and deliver."

When the first days of April came, she saw the Confederates, headed by Brederode and Count Louis, go past the Orange palace on their entry into Brussels; the two leaders halted with the Prince, who was entertaining them, and Rénée, leaning from the window, heard Brederode say as he crossed the courtyard, "Eh, well, here I am, and perhaps I shall depart in another manner."

The splendour of the Nassau mansion was no longer what it had been, though it was still magnificent. Richly appointed tables no longer stood ready for all comers at all hours of the day and night; the great number of servants was reduced; there were fewer balls, concerts, and feasts; the Prince bought no more tapestries, pictures, statues, rare books, nor costly plants; the jewel and the silk merchants no longer waited every morning in his antechamber, nor were vast sums any longer expended on hawks and hounds.

But for these two guests a generous welcome was prepared, and William himself met them on the stairs, kissing each on either cheek.

Rénée crept back to Anne, who sat among her German women, lamenting, complaining against her husband, against the Netherlands, against her own miserable fate.

The child played at her knee, but she regarded it with utter indifference. Rénée picked up the little girl and carried her away; the sound of the Princess's voice travelled across the apartments.

"Am I to be ruined for a parcel of heretics? Curse the day of my birth, curse my marriage day!"

VII - THE PETITION

The third day of April, which dawned over Brussels fair as refined silver, found Rénée at her post, leaning from her narrow window, its harsh stone frame serving as a sombre setting for her face, so unconsciously beautiful and so sadly serene.

She saw the Prince ride away with his gentlemen; the long green cloak in which he was wrapped could not quite conceal the glitter of the Order of the Golden Fleece flaming on his breast.

Rénée knew that he was going to attend the Regent in Council, for this was the day that the Confederates or Covenanters, as they were severally named, were to present their Petition to Madame Parma; and to-day, instead of going downstairs to her duties beside Anne, Rénée put on a hood and cloak of black cloth over her white linen whimple and her dark yellow gown, and went from the palace and out through the great gates into the street.

She allowed herself this much advantage from the secret hold she had over Anne--this one day's holiday; the night before she had told her mistress of her intention, and Anne had said nothing.

It was strange to be in the streets after the long confinement in the palace and the palace gardens; it was strange to be one of the people, amidst the ordinary life of a great city, after having been so long merely part of the machinery of a princely establishment.

Rénée received a sense of energy, of hope, of courage in thus finding herself free and one of the crowd. She wished she could learn some trade or art by which she could earn her own living; but she was too old to be taken as an apprentice, and even were she not, she had not sufficient money to keep herself while she acquired it, nor one friend or relation to whom she could appeal to help her.

No, there was no means of life open to Rénée but the one she was following, especially in these times of ruin and panic, when so many people were out of work, and those who had money were clutching it tight.

But she was not one to be daunted even by hopeless difficulties; she asked so little of life, cared so little when it ended, that if she had been considering only herself she would have left Anne's service and tried to find another great lady to take her, or have gone as a servant into some Protestant family. But she stayed with Anne because to

wait on his wife, to control her, to soften her furies, to check her excesses, was the sole poor unknown service she could render the man for whom she would have gladly done anything.

And now that she knew Anne's sordid and shameful secret, she had a power, an influence over her such as none other possessed, and could restrain her and bring her to some reason when all else had failed. The Prince might entreat his wife to appear on some state occasion, and she would rudely refuse; but when Rénée insisted, she would suffer herself to be attired and go.

So with a sigh Rénée relinquished her fleeting dreams of freedom and a sane, wholesome life among her own people.

As she moved further into the city she felt with overmastering pain how lonely she was, how unutterably lonely; all the companies she passed--women together, families, men with their wives and sisters emphasized the terrible feeling of her loneliness.

If it had not been for Philip and the Holy Inquisition, her life would not have been broken, her heart seared; she would have been as one of these; she would have had parents, money, position, friends, probably a lover--in a word, happiness.

Then she remembered that she was only one of thousands left desolate--perhaps more desolate than she was; fifty thousand, she had heard, had died under the Inquisition and the Edicts, and how many aching, maddened hearts had each of these deaths left behind? Rénée felt rebuked in her complaint of her loneliness; she shuddered as she went down the hill to the church of Ste Gudule--shuddered though the spring breezes were soft and the spring sun warm.

On the steps of the church she paused and looked down at the city

lying in the hollow of the hills, all the spires and vanes of the Town Hall and the palace, of the various guilds in the market-place rising delicate and erect into the pale and pure sky, while on all the irregular tumbled-looking roofs and gables the sun changed lead to gold and casement glass to diamonds.

She turned, lifted the heavy curtain at the low door in the greater door, and entered the church whose twin towers she had watched so constantly that they had come to mean to her the Papist power which dominated the land.

She had not been in a Romish church since she was a child and had crept into the great church of St. Baron at Ghent. She had not meant to enter this now, but a fascinated sense of horror drew her on--horror because she could not regard this faith with toleration; it stood to her for an epitome of idolatry, cruelty, wickedness, oppression, and uncharitableness.

She was not a Protestant by chance; her whole nature detested the Church of Rome. She stepped forward into the gloom, pulling her hood further over her eyes.

At first she could distinguish nothing but the seven thick wax candles burning on the altar and the red lamps flickering their eternal light before the shrines.

Then from the mystical shadows began to loom the shapes of pillars, massive, yet so dimly coloured as to seem impalpable, as if they were beneath the sea; brocades, marbles, altars set with jasper, silver, and chrysolite became visible in the side chapels, here and there the rapt faces of angels showed from some dark painting on the wall, the air was redolent of the incense, the wax smoke, and the scent of flowers. This mingled perfume was near as ancient as the church, which had remained for so long enclosed from the light and

air that it seemed as if built underground.

Such light as there was streamed richly from the coloured glass windows where saints and bishops blazed together in wheels and panels of glory.

Rénée fixed her eyes on the High Altar which was flushed with a shadow like golden-red wine, in the middle of which the flat, gold, ruby-studded doors of the shrine that held the Eucharist flashed and shone like the Eye of God itself. Beyond, the pillars and arches of the Lady Chapel rose up dim, and appearing of a translucent quality in the shade which here, flushed with the light from gold-coloured windows, was sea-green and amber behind the crimson of the altar.

Round the huge candlesticks of dark red Florentine copper were alabaster bowls, almost transparent, veined with violet, which held the first lilies of the year in sweet clusters--the lilies from wood and field called Easter lilies from the time of their coming.

The church was empty save for here and there the dark bent figure of a peasant before some side altar.

Rénée could not bring herself to bend the knee before the idols her father had perished to disown, and, with a trembling in her limbs as if some physical power had seized her and a choking in her throat as if the sweet thick air was poisonous, she turned and fled quickly into the pale sunshine without.

The excited people were already beginning to gather to watch the passing of the petitioners on their way to the palace.

Rénée did not know which way the procession was to pass, and she was largely ignorant of the city, but she followed the direction in which the great mass of the crowd was going.

She particularly noticed this crowd and its demeanour, the soberness, the earnestness, the silence of these people.

None of them seemed to be treating the occasion as a festival or as a holiday, if they showed a certain satisfaction it was grave and serious; very few of them were armed, and all of them were restrained in gestures and speech.

There were some gentry, on foot and on horse, but the great number were burghers, traders, and apprentices belonging to the seven great guilds of Brussels.

Rénée following in the wake of this crowd climbed the hill again, left the towers of Ste Gudule below, and came out on the heights above the town where stood the parks and mansions of the great nobles, and the Brabant palace which was the residence of the Regent.

As she passed the palace Rénée caught sight of the spare figure and excited face of the skryer Duprès, as he pushed his way through the crowd.

Rénée was disgusted to think the man was still in Brussels; she had hoped that he would find it wise to leave the Netherlands, or at least the town; but probably he had given up his dangerous occupation of rhetoric player and, with the spoils of the Nassau mansion, had established himself as a respectable Papist.

Now a great movement shook the crowd, a low hum rose from the throats of the men, and the women began to tiptoe excitedly and to lift their little children to their shoulders.

Rénée was at the back and could see nothing, but two men who had a point of vantage on the steps of a mansion near by gravely helped her up beside them.

One asked her if she was a Fleming?

"My father was hanged for a heretic in Ghent," answered Rénée, "and I am in the service of the Prince of Orange."

It gave her pleasure to mention the Prince and not his wife; and it was truly *his* service in which she was.

The two men took off their caps to her.

"The Spaniards will not hang many more Netherlanders," one remarked; and they supported Rénée against the balustrade of the steps so that she could see over the heads of the closely packed people.

Suddenly the humming changed into a clapping of hands and a deep shouting that made Rénée's blood tingle with excitement and deep emotion; she pushed back the hood from her flushed face and gazed at the procession which now appeared marching up the street and turning in at the splendid gates of the palace.

All were on foot and unarmed, all were nobles, many of the highest rank, and all were young and gorgeously attired, so that it was a magnificent procession, such as all the great festivals of Brussels had not seen before, which now ^ wound under the portals of the Brabant palace.

"He who goes first," said the man next to Rénée, "is Philip de Billeuel."

"And some think it an ill augury that he should be lame," remarked the other doubtfully.

Rénée had indeed remarked that the young nobleman who led the

petitioners halted unmistakably.

"And he in the black and blue," added her informant, straining his voice to make it heard above the clapping and the shouting--"with the look of fire, who is answering the cries of the people is Nicolas de Hammes whom they call Golden Fleece, and he behind in the sable cloak is Ste Aldegonde--"

Rénée had already recognized these two as well as several others whom she had seen at the Nassau palace, and as the rich and brilliant company of gentlemen passed before her, there were several of the eager, proud, young faces she knew as related to some of the noblest families of the land.

The enthusiasm of the crowd became almost piteous in its eager gratitude to these nobles who were making themselves the champions of the people and protesting so openly and in such an imposing fashion against the loathed Spaniards and the loathed Inquisition.

Encouraging shouts, adjurations, blessings, and thanks were showered on the petitioners, and some of the more reckless, as Golden Fleece and Ste Aldegonde, replied by shouting curses on the Inquisition and the Cardinalists. Renée recognized Count Culemburg and Count van der Berg, the Prince of Orange's brother-in-law, glittering in French brocades and Genoese velvet and great chains about their necks and round their hats.

Finally, closing the procession, came the two leaders Henry Brederode and Louis of Nassau.

They walked alone, arm in arm, the last of all, and for them the affectionate greetings of the crowd arose to a frenzy.

Count Brederode looked fitted to be the hero of such a moment: his tall and noble figure, his military carriage, his handsome face flushed with pleasure and triumph, his eyes sparkling with a reckless fire, the full locks of blond hair streaming on to his falling ruff, gave him the kingly presence of a leader of men.

He wore a suit of rose cloth of silver, and a great mantle of peacock-coloured velvet; in his high black hat was a long heron's feather clasped by a diamond.

Beside his grandeur Louis of Nassau looked very slight and youthful; he was more soberly dressed in dark blood red, with a great ruff of many points rising up above his face.

And whereas Brederode appeared mightily at his ease and greatly pleased with his task and his reception, Louis held himself more modestly and looked grave and even anxious; but there was about him a gallantry almost moving.

And so the last of them went into the palace, and the crowd broke up and stayed about in groups, talking eagerly together in excited voices while they waited for the reappearance of the petitioners.

Rénée wandered into a side street and entered a baker's shop which was filled with tired women and children.

The waiting-woman bought bread and cake and a kind of sweetmeat, and while she ate she listened to the conversation that flowed round her like many currents of the one river.

For the theme was always the same: the executions, the torturings, the ruin falling on trade and work.

And all spoke soberly without laughter or jest, and many had eyes swollen and frayed from weeping.

One only was unconcerned: a small child who stood in a world of his own, oblivious to the talk of death and ruin crossing above his head, while his eyes were fixed with an eager smiling look on the piece of sweetmeat Rénée held.

She found something marvellous and yet terrible in this utter absorption of the child in his own thoughts, in his calm, and his pleasure.

She put the sweet into his hand and left the shop.

For more than an hour she wandered about the streets, and, when she made her way back to the Brabant palace, the petitioners were beginning to leave.

Reports of their audience, that had been passed from soldiers and servants within the palace to those without, were already rife among the crowd and eagerly repeated from one to the other.

The Regent had wept when Brederode had made his speech, the tears had run down her face while the famous Compromise was read, and when all the members of the deputation had come forward, one by one, to make the "caroale" before the Duchess as a mark of respect, and she had thus had time to severally note their appointments, their importance, and their number, her agitation had increased so that Barlaymont had tried to reassure her: "What, Madame," he had said, "do you fear these beggars, who do not know enough to manage their own estates and then must needs prate of state affairs? Had I my way they should leave the palace quicker than they came!" This the Cardinalist was reported to have uttered loudly enough to reach the ears of some of the gentlemen, who repeated it among themselves with wrath and indignation.

Rénée waited until the Prince came from the palace; he rode out of the gates with Egmont, looking unhappy and troubled, at his side. The two grandees were greeted less warmly than the confederates. As neither had openly sided with the people, and as Egmont, at least, was a strict Catholic and something of a persecutor, they were not so popular as they had been in the days when they caused the downfall of Cardinal Granvelle.

Rénée stood in the roadway, where the passing of the Prince cast dust on her gown; she had one glimpse of his dark ardent face and he was gone.

Suddenly she felt very tired; the strangeness, the unnaturalness of her life, without home or ties, without friends or interests or diversions, and always supervised by a dull and ceaseless tyranny, weighed on her with the horror of tragedy. And this deep concealed passion, this strong faith, this devotion that lit this dreary life like a beacon on a desert was not in the nature of comfort, nay, rather it was a light that lit up dullness, dreariness, and barrenness which darkness would have mercifully concealed.

Had not all the suppressed feeling in her breast turned to this worship, she might have been happier, for she would not have known so keenly what she lacked; as it was she knew not even the peace of apathy.

Clouds were gathering over the April sky as she returned to the palace; every one talked of the Petition and what success it was likely to have; the streets were all filled with murmurs of hope, of doubt, of eagerness, and of expectation.

VIII - THE BANQUET

Twice more in the ensuing days did Brederode and his following present themselves at the Brabant palace, the first time to receive the Petition which was returned to them with Margaret's answer.

Madame Parma, as usual, referred everything to the King; the Petition should be forwarded to His Majesty, from whose well-known clemency there was everything to be hoped.

As for herself, she had no authority to suspend the Inquisition nor the Edicts, but she would give orders to the Inquisitors to behave with discretion; meanwhile she adjured the petitioners to act as men loyal to King and Church.

Brederode's third audience was for the purpose of answering this not very satisfactory concession; he urged the Regent to cease all religious persecution until the decision of the King arrived, to which Her Highness replied she could not go beyond her former answer, but that Count Hoogstraaten should show them the instructions to the Inquisitors, commanding them to moderation.

There was nothing more to be obtained from Madame Parma, and the confederates separated with such hopes as they were able to cherish, and such expectations of the good results of Margaret's letter to the King as their knowledge of Philip allowed them to entertain.

The evening of the day that Brederode had been for the last time to the Brabant palace, the Prince of Orange was dining with Mansfeld, who was sick with an inflamed eye; his companions were Egmont and Hoorne, and the four nobles discussed with gloom and foreboding the situation which Brederode and his fellow-petitioners had taken with such reckless gaiety.

Egmont was the most uneasy of all; the memory of his late visit to

Spain and how deftly Philip had twisted him to his will still rankled in his mind. He had seen that the King had not kept one of the lavish promises he had then made, yet the Count, though conscious of being fooled (he had utterly refused to go again to Madrid), yet could not wholly disbelieve in Philip nor bring himself to any action that might seem disloyal to His Majesty.

He had refused to associate himself in any way with Brederode's party, and he was one of the few Stadtholders who obeyed Philip by using his civil authority to enforce the decrees of the Inquisition.

Yet he saw as well as any man the utter ruin to which Philip's policy was bringing the Netherlands; his Brussels palace was full of refugee heretics, and he was still regarded by the people as their hero and their possible champion.

He even ventured now to predict possible concession as the result of the forwarding of the Request or Petition to Philip.

William glanced at him with smiling eyes in a manner that brought the blood to Egmont's cheek.

"You speak against your own wit," remarked the Prince quietly. "You *know* that the King will not be moved from his purpose by the Petition of these young men, led by such as Brederode."

"It were better for all," interposed Count Hoorne sourly, "if Brederode had kept out of politics."

"Politics?" smiled William. "Poor Brederode knows little of politics! But he is brave and loyal, Count; I can conceive good uses for Brederode."

"His present uses," said Egmont bitterly, "seem to be to embroil us

all. You know of this banquet to-night?"

"Yes," answered Mansfeld bitterly. "My son is there--I would to God he were elsewhere."

"There will be much treason talked," said Hoorne. "And Brederode in wine is no better than a madman."

William glanced at the clock in the corner.

"We are almost due at the council chamber," he said, rising.

"You work late," remarked Mansfeld.

"And to little purpose," said Hoorne, gloomily pulling at his black beard. "Eh, Prince?"

"To little purpose, truly," replied William gravely. "The affairs of the Netherlands are settled in Philip's Cabinet in Madrid, not in the council chamber at Brussels."

He smiled to himself thoughtfully and picked up his long velvet mantle from one of the brocade chairs.

"We will go round by the horse market," he added, "and see how this banquet progresses."

"Nay, I beseech you," said Mansfeld eagerly. "Keep away from all such dangerous sport!"

"Not sport nor pleasure," replied the Prince, "but Hoogstraaten is there and I would bring him away. And if the company is riotous I will disperse them," he added, with a sure and entirely unconscious certainty of power.

Mansfeld shrugged his shoulders; his inflamed and bandaged eye irritated him, and he was deeply vexed at his son's connexion with the confederates.

"This is an affair well enough for boys," he returned peevishly--"boys and roysterers but the Regent's councillors had best keep away."

William knew perfectly well what Brederode's banquet was likely to be, and how it would be regarded by the government; he knew also that Hoogstraaten had been persuaded to attend against his will, and wished to save him from too deep an implication in the riots in which the feast would undoubtedly end; nor was William without some kindly feeling for Brederode and a desire to check him in his dangerous recklessness.

Hoorne disliked Brederode, but he would gladly have done a service to the gallant Hoogstraaten, and Egmont was always eager to curb any display against the Government, so the three nobles, on taking leave of Mansfeld, set out towards the Culemburg palace where Brederode held his dangerous feast.

They had no sooner dismounted and crossed the courtyard of the mansion than the tumultuous uproar that reached their ears more than justified their apprehensions.

The banquet of the confederates had indeed degenerated into a riot and an orgy.

An argument had been raised as to what name the party, now so loosely designated, was to be called, and at the height of the discussion Brederode had sprung to his feet and related what Barlaymont had said when they first came into the presence of Madame Parma--

"What, is Your Highness afraid of these beggars! People of little power who cannot manage their own estates!"

When this sarcasm of one of their greatest enemies was repeated to them, the company, inflamed with wine, were strung up to a fever pitch of fury at the insult which had been offered them--all gentlemen of rank and noble blood.

Brederode seized the moment; taking a leathern wallet and a wooden bowl from one of his pages, he held them aloft over the glittering feast.

"Very well!" he cried. "They call us beggars! We will make them fear that word! We will contend against the Inquisition, and be loyal to the King until we are beggars indeed!"

He then filled the bowl with wine and drained it to the health of the beggars.

The party name was received with mad enthusiasm; it took the humour of all present; amid yells of approval and shouts of applause the wooden bowl was handed from one to another and each drank to the new party name. When the circuit of the table had been completed the bowl and wallet were fastened to one of the pillars which supported the ceiling, and the rites by which the petitioners received their new name were concluded by each member of the company hurling some salt and bread into his goblet, and repeating two lines of doggerel which some one's heated wits had instantly produced:

"Par le sel, par le pain, par le besache, Les gueux ne changeront quoy qu'onse se fache!"

This ceremony was at the height of unrestrained and reckless

merriment, furious and unlimited enthusiasm, when the three nobles entered the banqueting hall.

It was a wild and gorgeous sight on which they looked--a sight all of them would rather not have beheld.

It was the chamber in which Francis Junius had preached to a group of young Protestant nobles on Alexander of Parma's wedding day, but it was more suited to the present scene of unlicensed revelry than it had been to that sincere and ardent gathering.

The ceiling and the upper portion of the walls had been painted by an Italian artist in the precise and airy style of decoration which adorned the Roman palaces--delicate scroll-work, arabesques, birds and animals interwoven wonderfully on a ground of deep blue and burnished gold.

The lower part of the walls were hung with tapestry of Arras on brass rods, each panel representing a scene in the life of Jason, and between the tapestries were pillars with candle sconces in heavy copper and brass, fashioned as flowers and figures, which lit the vast apartment that was almost entirely occupied by an immense table at which three hundred gentlemen were seated.

At either end of the room, each side of the folding-doors, stood buffets, still loaded with fruit, sweets, and wines, and attended by pages; round the wall, at intervals, stood the servants in groups of twos and threes.

The table itself was lit by a huge lamp of rock crystal supported by four flying harpies, half gold, and half silver, with wings and tails shining in red enamel. This magnificent light illuminated the whole table and left in shadow only the extreme centre, where stood a gorgeous piece of confectionery, the master-effort of Count

Culemburg's cook, representing the confederacy entering the gates of the Brabant palace, the little figures--each of which was a portrait--being moulded out of sugar, cunningly coloured and adorned with cuttings of candied fruits.

This, on the huge raised comport of embossed gold, was untouched, but for the rest the table was in the wildest disorder.

Almost every thread of the cloth of Brussel's lace was stained with wine; gold goblets, crystal beakers, dishes of fruit, of cakes, of sweetmeats were scattered right and left; at one end two young men were dancing on the table, clinging to each other, while their unsteady feet knocked over glasses and plates; several had mounted on the backs of their chairs, and sat with their feet on the table edge, while they shouted at the top of their voices; others, their caps turned inside out and their doublets torn open, danced about the room vowing eternal friendship to each other and eternal fidelity to the party; a few retained their places at the table and, with beakers at their lips, pledged again and again the party of "the beggars"; most of them had baptized a neighbour into the confederacy by pouring wine over his shoulders and head, so that flushed faces, rich clothes, and tumbled locks alike dripped red.

The whole scene seemed coloured red--the bright red of wine sparkling over gold.

At the head of the table sat Count Brederode; his doublet of scarlet velvet was covered with a network of fine gold strung with pearls; every thread of his ruff was gold, it came up to his ears and was scattered with brilliants; from his shoulders hung a short mantle of silver cloth lined with white fur; he leant his elbows on the table and clasped between his jewelled hands a gold goblet carved with grapes and vine leaves. As he emptied it, the page at his elbow refilled it; the wine splashed down his ruff, his doublet, and his

sleeves; he laughed long and merrily, and now and then shouted at the top of his powerful voice--

"Par le sel, par le pain, par le besache, Les gueulx ne changeront, quoy qu'on se fache! Vivent le roi et les gueulx! vivent les gueulx!"

Such was the scene that met the eyes of William and his companions as they entered the Culemburg banqueting hall.

The Prince said nothing, but glanced to where Hoogstraaten sat, half-vexed, half-amused, near his host, whom he was endeavouring to restrain; Egmont uttered an exclamation of annoyance and dismay; Hoorne frowned bitterly, and darted a look of contempt from under his heavy brows at the laughing Count Brederode.

As soon as the three great nobles, the most powerful grandees in the Kingdom, were recognized, they were hailed with shouts of welcome and surrounded by a crowd of intoxicated youngsters, who took their presence as a good augury for the newly named party.

"No, no," said the Prince, putting aside the beakers that were being forced upon him. "I have come but for the length of a *miserere*--we are here for the Seigneur Hoogstraaten."

That nobleman rose, glad of an excuse to retire, and Brederode, turning, saw the three new-comers.

"Ah, Highness!" he cried, staggering to his feet. "Will you not come and drink the health of the beggars? Be seated--here on my right--" then looking at Hoorne with whom he had recently quarrelled, he added, "and the Admiral also! I did not look to see your sober face at any feast of mine, Count Hoorne!"

At this taunt the Admiral, who had been glancing at the saturnalia

with genuine disgust and sincere vexation, flushed to his bald head, and fixed his dark eyes menacingly on the speaker.

"I have come to save a better man than you, Count Brederode," he answered, "from the consequences of your folly. Folly? Is it not more than folly--is it not near madness and treason?"

The dark blue eyes of Brederode blazed.

"Think you your caution will save you, Count Hoorne? I tell you Philip will spare you as little as he will spare any man in this room, and Granvelle holds you as damned as any heretic who ever ate a sausage on a Good Friday!"

The sinister truth of these rude words made Egmont blench, but the Admiral received them with gloomy scorn; he felt quite secure in his own loyalty.

William, assailed by cries of "Long live the beggars!" the meaning of which was utterly unknown to him, made his way through the revellers to where Brederode stood.

The sight of the well-known slender figure, the calm earnest face, the air of authority, the immense attraction and power that the Prince possessed, sobered the reckless young nobles, the two dancing on the table were pulled down, those seated were dragged to their feet, the uproarious shouting was partly hushed.

"By Heaven this goes too far, Count!" said William, in a low voice. "The reckless things you have said tonight you will forget to-morrow when you have slept off your wine, but there are those who will not forget."

"Spies!" muttered Brederode. "Spies!"

"Among these stupid seeming lackeys, maybe," replied the Prince drily. "Why, man, you are not a fool; you know the Escorial has spies everywhere."

"I care not," said Brederode, with a certain grandeur in his recklessness; "why should we cringe to Spain's certain wrath? Nothing could bring us into favour at Madrid; let us then defy monk and Spaniard and prove we can defend our own!"

"Defiance of Spain given in this manner will be short-lived," answered the Prince. "Do you think you serve the Netherlands this way? So you only gain laughter."

"Let them laugh," returned the Count; "when the time comes they shall see I can fight as well as I can feast."

And he was seizing his replenished bowl, with the toast, "Damnation to the Inquisition and the Spaniards," forming on his lips, when William sternly took the wine from him and turned it on the floor, sending the beaker after it on to the Persian rug.

"End this, Brederode," he commanded, and his eyes shone dark with anger. "This is not a pot-house--there are some high interests in our several keepings--for the sake of these reckless boys you have brought here to-night, stop before you endanger all beyond help. Oh, Brederode," he added, with a sudden smile, "go to bed--for you are very drunk."

Brederode stared at him, suddenly laughed, then sat down silently, his glittering figure drooping back in the wide-armed chair.

Egmont and Hoogstraaten endeavoured to prevail on the rest of the company to disperse; intoxicated and excited as most of these were, they yet retained sufficient wit to rouse to a sense of their own

foolishness; to more than one the red wine running over floor and table and staining each others' faces and garments became a prediction of the red blood that might be flowing soon.

They well knew that Philip was as prodigal of blood as Netherland nobles of their wine; the sobriety and slight awe that had come over the gathering with the entry and remonstrances of the three was heightened by one of those trivial incidents that highly affect overwrought minds.

The sugar foundation of the elaborate and costly sweetmeat in the centre of the table suddenly gave way; the heat had melted it unperceived, and as its support flowed in sickly thick streams over the golden comport and the stained cloth, the little figures of the confederates fell here and there, mere crushed lumps of sweet, and nothing remained of the gorgeous piece of triumphal confectionery but a sticky discoloured mess.

"Men of sugar, men of sugar," muttered the Admiral. "So shall this company melt away."

The ugly omen was noticed by several; in twos and threes they smoothed their disordered habits and departed.

Only Brederode remained where he was, wrapt in a sudden melancholy.

"I shall die a poor soldier at the feet of Count Louis," he kept muttering; then: "Capon and sausage on Friday! Who says I did eat it lies twenty feet down in his throat!"

Seeing the company was now dispersed, the three nobles took their leave, Hoogstraaten accompanying them.

They came out into the calm April night, which was moonless and full

of sweetness; the stars lay entangled in little wisps of clouds, an under-breeze came fragrantly from the spring fields of Brabant.

William glanced back at the brilliantly lit mansion behind them.

"There is a silly short prologue to a long dull tragedy!" he remarked.

"Tragedy!" echoed Lamoral Egmont angrily. "You speak always as if we were on disaster, Prince."

William made no answer; they turned their horses' heads towards the Brabant palace, where Margaret, frightened and angry, debated matters of heaven and earth with Vigilius and Barlaymont.

IX - MONTIGNY'S WIFE

Count Hoogstraaten and the Baron Montigny were playing tennis in the pleasant courts of the Prince's palace gardens.

May was now fully in bloom, and at midday the sun was warm; the trees, newly covered with glossy leaves, cast a pleasant shade over the smooth lawns.

At the foot of one, a splendid beech, Montigny's wife sat on silk cushions and rugs, and resting her chin in her hand and her elbow on her knee, looked, with a certain wistfulness, at the figure of her husband as he moved lightly to and fro after the ball.

Leaning against the tree was the Prince of Orange, and close by, on a seat shaded by a high box hedge, sat Anne, attended by Rénée and the little German girl.

Already utterly forgetful that she was there to entertain the young bride, Anne was dozing in the sun, her head falling forward in an ugly

fashion.

The Prince took no notice of her, did not even glance in her direction; he was talking earnestly with Hélène d'Espinoy, the Baroness Montigny.

This lady, though her marriage festivities had but just concluded, and she seemed a creature made for joy and carelessness, followed with an interest almost pathetic the great and terrible events in which her husband moved.

She was talking now of the field-preachings and camp meetings which had spread with irresistible force all over the country--the answer of the heretics to the decrees of the Council of Trent.

"It is a wonderful thing, is it not, Prince," she said in her soft voice, that seemed only fitted to sing to a lute, "that people will do this for their faith? The penalty is death alike to all; yet they go, men, women, and children--risking death and torture, to stand in the fields to hear some unfrocked monk preach! Is it the Devil makes them so strong?"

"You might rather call it God," said William, looking down at her.

She lifted her face now--a delicate, rather sad face, with beautiful eyes. She fingered her ruff and eased it where it pressed against her cheek, and sighed.

"You seem dismayed, Madame," said the Prince gently.

"Yes," she answered at once. "Because my lord goes to Spain."

"He has resolved on that, then, finally?" asked William quickly.

"Yes--he and Marquis Berghen go this month." She tried to smile. "Is

it not hard? I have had him so short a time."

"He might refuse to go," answered the Prince, with some eagerness.

"He is reluctant, but he has accepted," said the lady, and again her glance turned towards the tennis court. "But I," she added suddenly, "I dread that he should go to Madrid!"

"You must not fancy disaster, Madame," returned William.

"I am not foolish," she quickly defended herself. "But I know he has offended the King by refusing to enforce the Inquisition in his provinces--"

"Ah, as to that, console yourself," said the Prince. "Philip has a long arm--your husband will be as safe in Madrid as his brother is here, Madame."

"You mean neither are safe?" she asked swiftly. "But there is special danger in Spain--ah, it is to walk into the lion's mouth for a Netherlander to go to Madrid! Count Egmont will not go again."

"That will not save him if he has incurred Spanish wrath," remarked William, with a sigh.

Montigny's wife rose with an agitated movement.

"What will happen?" she asked. "*He* will tell me nothing--Your Highness will be kinder, and tell me what will happen?"

She stood like a child before him, with her childish request on her lips and her little hands clasped on her white silk bodice.

"If I could tell!" smiled the Prince. "All is a confusion: the Regent is bewildered; she has no power to enforce her authority--the King is

silent."

He did not add that he knew what was behind the King's silence: that Philip was slowly and elaborately preparing the most exact and far-reaching punishment for those who had opposed his policy in the Netherlands, and that the Duke of Alva, with an army at his back, was soon to take the place of the overwhelmed and uneasy Margaret.

To change the lady's thoughts, he reverted again to the field-preachings, to the courage of these men, who with their swords at their side went out to hear a man with a price on his head preach Jesus Christ.

Sometimes they met in barns or houses, but more often in the open fields, outside the city walls, where preaching was forbidden.

They went in hundreds, in thousands, so that sometimes the city would be empty and the hymns of Clement Marot would rise as fearlessly as if there was no Inquisition waiting for them with faggot and chain, sword and axe.

William spoke warmly and with a lively sympathy.

"The mind and the soul are not in the keeping of king nor priest--no man has a lordship over another man's conscience," he said. "All history has proved that."

Hélène d'Espinoy had never thought of this. She was sorry for all these people who had to die, so sorry she did not care to dwell on the thought, but questions of ethics were unknown to her; she only wanted peace, and her own happiness secure in a happy world.

She looked at the garden, so fresh and lovely; at the sky, so serene and soft; at the two young nobles laughing over their game; at her own luxurious apparel--and she wished, in a sad and simple way,

that these things could endure and that nothing would ever come to disturb them.

"Ah, Seigneur," she said, "why cannot all men believe in the one true God?"

"Each man's God is one and true to him, Madame. The weaver of Tournay burnt to death over a slow fire for casting the wafer out of the priest's hand found his God as true as Philip finds his--for to the last he called on Him and even smiled. I wonder," added the Prince thoughtfully, "if Philip in torment would find support in his faith!"

"It is all terrible," answered Hélène d'Espinoy in a shaken voice, "and these people have power they will fight, they will resist. It will not be so easy to subdue them."

"Easy enough for Alva," thought William. "The Duchess is only helpless because she is without money and without men."

"Easy to subdue," he repeated aloud; and went on to tell Madame Montigny of the camp-meetings at Tournay, where the Reformers were six to one against the Catholics, and when the Regent sent orders to the trained bands to arrest the worshippers, it was found that all of them--the cross-bowmen of St. Maurice, the archers of St. Sebastian, the sword players of St. Christopher--were themselves heretics, who eagerly attended the preaching of Ambrose Wille, the famous disciple of John Calvin, and new come from Geneva.

"Since they are so much in earnest, these people," said Montigny's wife, "might not His Majesty allow them their faith and their preaching?"

"His Majesty will no more ever allow the preaching than the people will ever give it up; and there is the great tragedy--these few poor

people and the greatest king in the world!"

Montigny now left the tennis court and came towards the two under the shadow of the beech tree.

His face, which had the dark colouring, the look of reserve and strength of his brother, Count Hoorne, but none of that nobleman's joyless gravity, flushed with a look of love as he glanced at his wife. It was to the Prince he spoke.

"Tennis is a childish sport for these open days of spring--we should be trying hound and falcons in the open campaign."

He put his arm lovingly round the Prince's shoulder and drew him aside. Hoogstraaten, the intimate friend of both, followed them.

Hélène d'Espinoy glanced round for the Princess, and Rénée, with the watchfulness of one in charge of a puppet whose strings must be pulled at a given signal, touched her mistress on the shoulder and roused her attention.

As soon as the three young men were out of hearing of the women, Montigny left talk of hounds and falcons to speak at once of the state of things in his Stadtholdership and of the immense increase of the daring and power of the heretics. It was indeed a subject which no man, from the humblest to the highest, could long keep from his mind and lips.

Montigny was inclined to think that the Netherlands had successfully asserted themselves; they had proved that they were too numerous to be stopped by force from exercising what religion they chose, and too courageous to be frightened by threats and punishment into abandoning their faith, and persecution for the moment had slackened. Brederode's party, "the beggars," were

strong and much to the front; their Petition or Request was now before Philip. That monarch was silent--might he not be considering it reasonably?

Thus Montigny, who shared the stubborn loyalty of his brother Hoorne and the credulous optimism of Lamoral Egmont.

William saw the other side of the picture: he knew that the famous Petition and the long deliberations which had followed had only resulted in the "moderation" decree, which the people instantly named "murderation," since the only concession it made was to sometimes substitute hanging for a more horrible means of death; and this was without Philip's sanction, and only flung as a sop to the people by Margaret while she waited for her brother's instructions.

The Prince saw too that the persecutions had only slackened because the Regent found herself without men or money, and that, whenever possible, the heretic preachers were hunted down like wild beasts. Brederode might rejoice, Montigny might be hopeful, but William of Orange saw that the present lull was but the prelude to a more awful vengeance on those who disobeyed Philip than any that had yet befallen.

He knew that the Regent's attitude of moderation, her affected kindness to the nobles, her loud-voiced desire for concord and peace, was but a farce, and that probably in her secret letters she was denouncing all of them to Philip.

These things William did not say to Montigny, he had warned him so often; but he suddenly stopped in the middle of the flower garden and said earnestly--

"Do not go to Spain--it is so useless."

"You too?" cried Montigny. "All warn me--but how refuse? I have a conscience clear of disloyalty."

"That will not help you in the Escorial," said William, with some impatience.

"I have not offended His Majesty," persisted the Stadtholder of Tournay and Tournaisis.

"Ah, Baron!" cried Hoogstraaten, "you offended all Spain when you refused to burn the poor heretics!"

"I detest and spurn the Inquisition," answered Montigny warmly. "I go to Madrid to protest against it--but never, Count, have I done anything to anger Church or King."

"That is known only to Philip and to Granvelle!" said William, looking down at the bed of flowers at his feet. "Do not go--it is so useless!"

"Count Egmont failed," urged Hoogstraaten.

"I shall not be so easily caressed," returned Montigny.

"The worse for you," answered the Prince. "Those the Spanish cannot fool they will win another way. And your going is for nothing. If Philip will pay no heed to what the Regent writes, will he pay heed to what you and Berghen say? Did he pay heed to you before? Does he heed any argument?"

"I am not hopeful," admitted Montigny, with a slight sadness in his voice. "But I have been chosen, and I cannot, without disloyalty, refuse."

The Prince still stood looking down at the flowers which were gently waving their soft heavy heads together.

"Do not go," he said for the third time. "Let another man take this mission. You are young, you are just wed--"

"Give me words of good omen!" cried Montigny, with a laugh and a frown.

"Good omen!" said William firmly. "I find no words of good omen in my heart. Yet," he sought for the same consolation which he had given Hélène d'Espinoy "it is true that Philip can reach one here as easily as in Madrid--"

They turned now towards the house, to which the women had already gone; and presently the Montignys took their leave, he being due at his last audience with the Regent.

Hoogstraaten lingered a little after him to question the Prince anxiously.

"He is infatuate--do you think he goes into great danger?"

"I think neither he nor Berghen will return," answered William. "And I am sorry for that poor child, his wife--sorry beyond words."

He turned away quickly, then turned back again and caught Count Hoogstraaten warmly by the hand.

"*You* will not leave me, Antony?"

"I am your poor servant always," replied the Count, with great affection; "content to be guided by you, and you alone, in all these troubles."

Then he too left. William watched his little, gallant figure ride away, and then returned to the antechamber where he had parted from

Montigny and his wife.

There sat Anne in the same listless attitude in which he had left her, with her elbows propped on a table covered with a rich tapestry and her face sunk in her small, large-veined hands.

And behind her, as always, was Rénée, motionless, like her shadow.

It was usual for the Prince to pass his wife in silence when he thus met her by chance, but now, though with an obvious effort, he came across the room.

"Madame," he said; then, "Anne."

She looked up; her sallow face flushed and she glanced down again, spreading out her hands on her skirt.

Rénée turned to go, but the Prince said, "Stay." He stood looking at his wife in a silence that held no judgment; he gazed at her rather as if he sought to throw the protection of tenderness over her sickly unloveliness, her miserable melancholy. Always in the Prince's attitude towards his wife there had been this gentleness, which was at once gallant and touching.

"Anne, I have been wishing to speak to you."

She made no response.

"You always disliked Brussels, did you not, Madame?" he added.

"Why do you ask that?" she demanded, with instant suspicion.

"Because I find it necessary that you should go to my house at Breda," he answered kindly. "There is no need for me to keep open this mansion--few of us live in Brussels now; and when I must come, I

can lodge more simply. At Breda you will be safer than here."

"Ah, this is your economy, your retrenchment!" exclaimed Anne bitterly. "Do you not think I see how miserable this establishment has become? Half the servants we had formerly, and those with worn liveries; the stables half empty, the gardens neglected, and nothing increasing but debts!"

The Princess exaggerated, but there was truth in what she said--as Rénée knew, and as it gave her a strange pang to know.

But William answered lightly--

"I am not as rich a man as I was, Anne, and shall be, likely enough, poorer before the tale is told. But if I do not spend what I did, it is not through niggardliness, but because I may need money for other purposes than that of magnificence. You shall be well enough at Breda."

"Not the Devil and all his legions shall drag me to Breda!" answered Anne, with great violence.

"Nay, but your husband will," answered William, smiling.

His good-nature, that arose from neither weakness nor indifference, but from a warm compassion and a deep sympathy for others, never failed him; not once had Rénée seen him angry or rude to man or animal, and towards women he was always softly gentle.

Anne seemed to recognize this quality in him; to realize that all her fret and fury might be expended in vain against his serenity. She rose and without another word or look left him.

The Prince turned to Rénée as she was following her mistress.

"You are very faithful," he said, "and I know that you have no easy service."

In these words, in his voice and his face, she read the bitterness of his sorrow and humiliation in his wife. She noticed how tired he looked, how plain, even careless, was his dress. He was already much changed from the splendid cavalier who had mounted the stairs to greet his bride that St. Bartholomew's Day in Leipsic.

"It is my one pleasure to serve," she answered; "there is no other interest in my life."

He looked curiously at her warm beauty, on which her words seemed such a strange commentary.

"I may be called to Antwerp, where there is great trouble," he said; "in my absence speak to the Princess anent Breda—for there she must truly go, shortly."

He looked away out of the window as if he had already forgotten the waiting-woman, and Rénée silently withdrew.

X - ANTWERP

Duprès the skryer did not stay long in Brussels; in a short time he had spent in lavish living the greater part of the spoils he had gathered from the Nassau mansion, and, his restless spirit tiring of the Brabant capital, he began wandering through the troubled land, attaching himself, where possible, to Brederode and his party of "the beggars," who were making a noisy progress over the country.

He was at the great meeting the members of the Confederacy held at St. Trond, and joined in the noisy demonstrations and riotous feasting that "the beggars" always indulged in and which made them

but a poor reed for Liberty to lean on. He went with Brederode and Culemburg to Duffel, where they met Orange and Egmont, who came on behalf of the Regent to urge the Confederates to preserve the peace of the country instead of disturbing it, as they did by their riots and armed assemblies.

To which request Brederode replied very briefly that they were there to protect the poor people who wished to worship in the fields, and that until a satisfactory answer to the Petition was brought back by the two envoys, Berghen and Montigny, they would neither disarm nor disperse.

This answer was embodied in a paper which Louis of Nassau and twelve other young nobles carried to Brussels and put before the Regent herself.

Their boldness and plain speaking inflamed Margaret to fury.

She retorted by a cold and ambiguous rebuke; and Louis, going further in his audacity, replied that the Confederacy were not without friends, either at home or abroad, and that if the Duchess still refused to convoke the States-General, as she had been often implored to do, and if, as many imagined, a Spanish invasion was preparing, they, "the beggars," would know what to do.

Soon after, the gathering at St. Trond broke up and Brederode went to Antwerp, then perhaps the most troublous spot in the Netherlands.

Duprès accompanied the train of landlopers, gentlemen, refugee Reformers, and ruined merchants who followed Brederode, and made his living by selling charms, telling fortunes, and reading the portents the fearful saw nightly in the sky.

Meghem and Aremberg, the two chief Cardinalists, were already in

the city, and when Brederode arrived the situation became almost impossible. There were riots daily, and a civil war, between Papists, Calvinists, Lutherans, and Anabaptists, was considered as inevitable.

Brederode fanned the zeal of the Reformers into fury, while Aremberg and Meghem supported the loyal, or Spanish, party.

The Senate, the Council, and the Corporation implored the presence of the Prince of Orange, who was Burgrave of the city; and being further urged by the Regent, he took up the impossible task of pacification, and arrived in the city in the midst of a tumultuous scene of welcome, Brederode and his "beggars" meeting him beyond the walls with deafening shouts and hurrahs.

William had not placed himself on the side of the people, and he was acting for the Government; but there was a general confidence in him as the one man likely, or able, to bring about concord and an understanding between the King and his subjects.

In Antwerp he at once devoted himself to the task of restoring order, and spent laborious days and nights consulting with the Senate, the Council of Ancients, and even the trade guilds and the chambers of rhetoric, in inducing Brederode to keep quiet, and in reasoning with Meghem and Aremberg to suspend their bitterness against the Reformers.

He had succeeded in establishing some measure of tranquillity, though no one was better aware than himself that this tranquillity could not be long maintained, when he received a summons from the Regent to attend a meeting of the Knights of the Golden Fleece.

He represented to Margaret the dangerous situation within the city, and that probably tumults would follow his departure; but she insisted

on his presence in Brussels, and he accordingly prepared to leave Antwerp.

For a day or so all was quiet, but the 18th of August was approaching, and that date was the feast of the "Ommegang," when the sacred image of the Virgin was taken from her place in the Cathedral and carried in triumphant procession through the streets; and the city senate, wards, and guilds, as those responsible for the safety of the city, as well as the Burgrave, looked forward with dread to this event, which was sure to raise the passions of the Reformers to the bitterest pitch.

Others, such as many of the "beggars" and such-like adventurers who remained in the city, looked forward with pleasure to a riot, in which there would be a chance to break a few heads and perhaps snatch a little plunder in the fray.

Among these was Duprès. Nothing delighted him so much as disorder and confusion; in troubled waters he was always able to swim to the surface—in calm seas he generally sank.

And to this selfish and mischievous desire for riot and storm was joined some sincere loathing of the Papists, and some sincere sympathy with the persecuted Reformers.

Duprès was no theologian, and could not have argued on either side of the religious question; but during his stay in the Netherlands he had seen some executions, the horrors of which made his hair rise and his blood run cold to think of, and which had sent him for ever into the ranks of Philip's enemies.

On the morning of the 18th, Duprès was early in the streets and had early taken up his position near the Cathedral.

The temper of the people was silent and dangerous; but the sacred image was suffered to make her procession in peace, assailed only by a few coarse jibes and a few cries of "Long live the beggars"; and the day ended without a tumult, to the great vexation of Duprès. That evening the Prince left Antwerp. The next morning it was discovered that the image, instead of being stood, as was usual, in the centre of the church, had been placed behind iron railings in the choir.

This soon brought together an excited and contemptuous crowd, who passed in and out of the great church all day, scoffing at the images and the altars.

Towards evening, a Papist sailor, who indignantly protested against this irreverent behaviour, provoked a scuffle in which blows were exchanged and swords drawn.

The priests and custodians of the church managed, however, to clear the building of the rioters and to close the Cathedral at the usual hour.

Duprès, who had stationed himself in the porch all day to exchange pleasantries with those of his acquaintances who came and went, had to return home without having seen the riots he had anticipated; but as he made his way through the crowded street he met one of Brederode's followers, a member of the Rhetoric Chamber of the "Marigold," who told him that the Senate was in consultation with the Margrave of Antwerp, that they were issuing a notice calling on the citizens to preserve law and order, and that an express had been sent to Brussels to implore the Prince of Orange to return.

So it seemed as if those in authority feared worse than the riot which Duprès had been so disappointed in not beholding. While he was eating his supper in one of the small sailors' inns on the quay of the Scheldt, he heard that the Senate was proposing to call to arms the

city companies.

The next morning, the second after the feast of the Ommegang, Duprès rose in the early midsummer's dawn and proceeded to the Cathedral, which seemed to be the centre about which all the deep passions of Antwerp gathered.

As he had protected himself in Brussels by wearing Egmont's famous livery, so now he donned the popular costume of the "beggars," a plain suit of grey camlet, a mendicant's hat, a wallet and bowl at his waist, and one of the "beggar" medals hung round his neck.

Early as it was when he reached the Cathedral square, there were many already abroad--indeed, some had not been to bed at all. Artisans, apprentices, tradesmen, clerks, gentlemen, peasantry, women, girls, and boys stood about in groups, talking earnestly.

They all seemed emboldened by the fact that the Senate had, after all, done nothing: no proclamation had been issued, no companies called to arms, and the Cathedral was open as usual.

Duprès, wandering about the square from one knot of people to the other, was suddenly moved to glance up at the great church. He had often thought how seldom men lift their eyes from the level of their fellows; whenever he did so himself, he was conscious, as now, of a certain shock.

The sky was not yet wholly filled with the sun; the dark purple hue of the August night still lingered in the west, and the church was in shadow save for the exquisite spire which soared up erect into the upper air and light and into the sunbeams now passing over the roofs of the surrounding houses.

The beautiful tower, rising so high above the city, as delicate as a flower and as strong as iron, was a noble object that symbolized the loftiest feeling of which, perhaps, man is capable--the spiritual desire to reach up to escape the earth.

Duprès, always alive to the grand and the lovely, was moved by the sight of the marvellous spire, so high above all this passion, and turmoil, fury and bitterness which beat and lashed below it; he felt a desire to enter the building, though Romish churches were usually hateful to him, and he considered them dangerous also for one of his party.

To-day, however, he was emboldened by the general fearlessness of the crowd and by the number of Reformers, or heretics, abroad.

So he went up to the great bronze doors; before them sat an old woman selling candles, tapers, and little trivial pictures and images.

To-day a little group was gathered round her, threatening that her trade was nearly at an end, and hurling at her pungent gibes to which she replied by fierce and voluble abuse.

Duprès slipped by these, lifted the heavy curtain which hung before the inner door, and stepped into the church.

At first the immense size, the immense height, bewildered him, he and the others there seemed like dwarfs lost in an immense twilight forest.

A forest strewn with jewels instead of flowers, and lit with priceless lamps of gold and silver instead of by sun and stars and moon.

It was indeed the richest church in the Netherlands, and one of the most sumptuous in Christendom.

Over four centuries of lavish labour, of infinite care, of prodigal expenditure had gone to the adornment of the building, the entire art expression of a nation had gone to the decoration, all the finest inspirations of the best artists, all the most painful and wonderful work of the best craftsmen were contained within these lofty walls, and all was sanctioned and hallowed by unending prayers and devotions, unending tears and penitences, unending humiliations before God.

Like a closed box of precious jewels the magnificent church, containing the utmost of man's efforts towards beauty and splendour, lay humbly before the feet of the Lord.

The mystical aspect of this material splendour touched and moved Duprès; he stood inside the door, looking down the vistas of the five aisles which were all enveloped in a wine-coloured dusk, broken here and there by vivid burning beams of light as the sun struck the fiery windows where the glass blazed orange, purple, violet, and azure with the uttermost strength of which colour is capable, and which seemed to melt into infinite grey-green distance behind the altar.

In between the pillars of the naves were gorgeous tombs on which ladies and cavaliers in alabaster, marble, brass, and painted wood lay with humble hands pointing upwards, while the glow from the windows fell on the silk and brocaded banners which hung above them.

The walls were lined with chapels and altars, each sparkling like a cluster of brilliant gems; among them were conspicuous those of the twenty-seven city guilds whose banners and escutcheons were fastened above the entrance grilles.

The vista was closed by a huge sculptured group of white marble

which rose above the High Altar; against the soft mysterious shadows and flickering lights of the Lady Chapel the colossal figures representing Christ and the two thieves on the Cross showed with a luminous glow half-rose, half-amber which rendered the outlines impalpable and the hue like the soft substance of flesh. Behind was dimly visible the exquisite outline of the tabernacle or repository, the shrine for the mystical body of Christ, which rose on a single pillar in a series of beautiful arches and columns till lost in the deep warm shadows of the roof.

Duprès moved slowly down the centre aisle; the air was heavy with the drowsy perfumes of myrrh and spikenard, and misty with the perpetual fumes of incense; the eternal lamps and the perfumed candles which burnt before shrines and altars gleamed on wrought gold, embossed silver, splendid paintings, silk tapestries, beaten bronze, carved wood, and all the marvellous details of the crooked stone of columns and roof and walls, which were rich with a thousand forms of birds, beasts, flowers, and creations of pure fantasy.

Duprès began to notice his fellow-companions who were walking in twos and threes round the aisles; they were mostly of the poorer sort, and their behaviour was rude and noisy.

A considerable crowd was gathered in the choir, where the sacred image stared at them from behind her iron bars.

A few priests hurried to and fro; they looked, Duprès thought, frightened.

He wandered back to the main entrance and stared out.

The sun was now blazing hot and dry on the dusty square, and Duprès started to see what an enormous number of people had collected. In the church porch a fight had begun round the ancient

pedlar, whose goods had been flung on the ground, and who was defending herself with sticks and stones.

Pistol shots were fired, sticks brandished; blood began to flow, and the temper of the people was fast rising with fury.

Duprès quickly withdrew into the church again, and slipped into the first chapel inside the door which was empty, and where he could observe unmolested.

People began to throng into the cathedral; they surged to and fro, muttering together; the priests had all disappeared.

Duprès was becoming stiff and tired, the marble step of the chapel altar was hard; the air became stifling hot with the increase of the sun without. But the skryer seldom went unprovided against bodily needs; he drew from his wallet a substantial meal of bread and meat and fruit, and devoured it gravely, blinking up at the mosaic and paintings that lined the chapel.

The crowd was meanwhile increasing; their shouts and cries, their threatening looks, promised no peaceful dispersal this time.

Duprès gently closed the gilt gates of the chapel on himself, and grinned through them at the swarming throngs.

He wondered why the authorities made no effort to check the tumult, and even as he was scorning them for their cowardice, the great doors of the church were thrown open, and a pale finely-dressed gentleman entered, attended by the two burgomasters and all the senators in their robes of office.

Duprès knew this gentleman for Jan van Immerzeel, Margrave of Antwerp, who had evidently come in person to endeavour to quell the riot.

Peering through the gilt bars Duprès watched him as he made his way, with dignity and calm, into the centre of the church, watched his gestures as he entreated the people to disperse.

"If it was the Prince of Orange now!" smiled Duprès, "but who will stir for *him*?"

The presence of the Margrave and the senators seemed, however, to have some effect; many of the people left the church, the others became more tranquil.

So the day wore on; Duprès, tired of the little chapel but willing to see events to a finish, yawned and wearied and presently fell asleep on the red damask cloth which covered the altar steps. He was roused to the sound of the renewed tumult of a surging crowd refusing to leave, declaring they would wait for vespers.

The Margrave, speaking from the High Altar, said there would be no vespers that night; the people then pointed out that the senators should quit first, leaving them to follow, and the magistrates, weary with their long vigil, departed, closing after them all the doors save one.

Duprès now crept out of his hiding and stretched his stiff limbs.

He noticed the Margrave was still there, standing by the High Altar--a small brilliant figure beneath the colossal marble ones of Christ and the thieves.

He held his cap with a heron's feather in his ungloved hand and kept his eyes on the crowd. Though the magistrates had some while since left the building, no one followed them, but a considerable number began to stream in steadily through the one door left open for

egress.

The Margrave, seeing this, sprang quickly on to the altar steps and, raising his voice, commanded, and then besought, the people to disperse.

No sooner was his voice heard than a party of men, as if in answer to a given signal, rushed on him and drove him and his attendants towards the door.

There was but a brief struggle; Duprès saw the nobleman's sword wrenched from his hand and sent whirling and glittering into dusky air, then he was forced into the street.

Now with one accord the people ran to all the doors, slipped back the bolts, and opened them; those waiting without at once thronged into the church with the force and swiftness of the sea across a broken dike.

Duprès, driven before this resistless throng of humanity, darted into the choir and clung to the back of the altar; all Antwerp seemed within the church, and now there was no one to restrain or threaten, to implore or coerce.

The skryer shivered a little; through the open doors of the Sacristy he had a glimpse of frightened priests and treasurers with gold and jewels in their hands; then they cast down the precious objects and fled.

Duprès' blood warmed at the sight of the gold, his eyes glittered.

"Are they going to plunder the church?" he asked himself, and he gazed round the unspeakable splendour of the building with lustful eyes.

An ominous lull, a deadly silence reigned over the crowd, then with sudden fierceness there rose the passionate rhythm of a Protestant psalm breaking harshly on the air that still seemed full of the chantings of the priests and full of echoes of Latin prayers; the strong Flemish words, rising from lusty Flemish throats, sprang forth like a battle cry, and with a movement that was also like the movement of a battle, a number of men and women threw themselves on the iron cage containing the image of the Virgin.

In an incredibly few minutes the figure was dragged out, torn into shreds, and cast into the air and along the floor.

A deep roar of triumph followed, and Duprès, who could scarcely believe his eyes, saw that they were beginning to destroy everything in the cathedral.

A shiver shook him, a sense of dread and terror, as if he knew he was going to be a witness of something horrible; he cowered down behind the lofty marble group of the Crucifixion which rose so high above the heaving, surging throng.

The sound of blows began to mingle with the staves of the psalms, and the shout of "Long live the beggars!"

The crowd began to tear the tapestries from the walls, to drag down the pictures and slash them with knives, to knock over the images, and hurl the statues from the niches.

Duprès drew his breath sharply, his head began to reel at the sight of this fury of desecration; then a lust, a madness, an exaltation crept into his veins; he sprang out from his hiding-place and drew the stout cudgel he kept at his belt.

For once the Reformers were in power, for once there was no

creature of Philip's to protect Philip's God--the Romish Church which had persecuted the heretics so unfalteringly, so bitterly, so persistently, had now no champion here to protect her temple.

A woman whose red hair fell on a white neck and rough kerchief leapt up the altar steps, dashed open the golden doors of the sanctuary with her fists, dragged out the Eucharist, and flung it down to be trampled under foot; a number of youths sprang to her side, and in a moment the altar was cleared of all the costly furniture.

A great and extreme fury now seized the rioters; it was as if they would revenge on the Papists' church all the blood the Papists had shed, all the misery they had caused; there were fifty thousand executions in the Netherlands to be remembered against the Romish Church.

The magistrates came down once more to the cathedral, but on hearing the terrible, almost inhuman, noise that issued from the building, they fled back to the town hall without attempting an entrance.

It was now so dark in the church, that the women took the lamps and candles from the altars and lit the men at their work; the beautiful column supporting the repository was shattered under a hundred blows; as arch on arch, pillar on pillar, crashed to the ground they were pounded with mallets into a thousand pieces.

Seventy chapels were utterly wrecked; there was not a picture nor a tapestry left in place; with incredible speed and incredible strength stone, marble, bronze, brass, wood were hurled down, broken, hammered, defaced.

The figures on the tombs were beaten out of all likeness to humanity, the banners were torn down and slit to shreds, knives and spears

were driven into the mosaics and wall painting, fragments of alabaster were hurled through the gorgeous glass window. The inspiration, the labour, the riches of four hundred years were in a few hours destroyed; the incalculable wealth, the perfect flower of art which had come to perfection and could never be again, the industry, the patience of entire lives, the offerings of generations, the worshipped treasures of thousands--all these were, in the space of a few hours, reduced to utter ruin, to broken fragments, and tattered rags by those who saw nothing in what they destroyed but the symbols of a monstrous tyranny and the pageantry that disguised all cruelty and wickedness.

The madness got into Duprès' blood; he struck right and left, he shouted, he sang, he scaled up the pillars to strike down the sculptures above them; he dashed into the chapels to tear out the relics and leap on them; he split the painted panels of altar-pieces, and dug out the inlay and mosaic on the walls.

He was one of the party who burst into the Sacristy, who poured out the communion wine, and stamped on the wafers, who rubbed their shoes with the holy oil and hung the priests' priceless copes and chasubles on their own shoulders.

Then they broke into the treasury; choice illuminated missals and chorals, robes, staffs, and chalices were hurled right and left, the elaborate cupboards and beautiful chests being ruthlessly smashed.

The wealth of the church was immense, the hoarded gatherings of centuries, and, it seemed to Duprès in his madness, as if he had at last found the Philosopher's Stone: was not everything gold and precious stones?

For as chest after chest was burst open and the contents scattered on the floor, the rioters stood ankle-deep in riches.

Crystal goblets, candlesticks, pattens, lamps, chains, reliquaries of fine gold; ewers, caskets, rings and staffs set with pearl, with sapphire, with ruby and emerald; vases and dishes of glowing enamel; statues and images in ivory and silver; rosaries in rare gems; lace vestures worth as much as gold; stoles, gloves, and staffs all of incomparable workmanship and all sparkling with jewels; books with gold covers; censers of pierced gold, lamps of pure gold, candlesticks six foot high of gold; altar cloths worked in gold thread, in silver thread, in magnificent silk embroidery, in women's hair--all these were cast out and defaced, torn and broken, dashed against the walls, and spurned with the feet.

But nothing was taken; stronger passions than cupidity were governing men. The ragged Protestants, many of whom had not the price of a supper in their pockets, scorned to pilfer the priests' treasure; with one accord they left the desecrated splendour and dashed back to the church.

Duprès would willingly have enriched himself, but dare not so much as take a single article.

In the cathedral the last outrage was being offered to the Romanist Faith.

Round the High Altar, now bare and broken, stood a circle of women holding aloft the flaring, smoking, perfumed holy candles to light a group of men who, by means of ropes and axes, were dragging the great marble Christ from His position.

St. John, the Maries, and St. Joseph had been already hurled to the ground, where they lay shattered on the marble pavement, and soon the colossal cross shivered and swayed against the background of murky shadows, fell forward within the ropes, and pitched on to the altar steps.

A dozen furious hammers soon dashed man and cross to pieces.

There was now nothing left standing in the church but the two huge figures of the malefactors hanging on their crosses.

Awful and ghostly they looked with that blank space between them, behind them darkness stained with the red candlelight, around them ruin, and above them the mysterious dark loftiness of the mighty roof.

With bitter irony the heretics left the two thieves in their places, then, having completely devastated and destroyed everything within the cathedral, they swept out into the summer darkness.

The night was yet young, and there were thirty more churches in Antwerp; triumphantly singing a hymn of praise they dashed to the nearest, from which the trembling priests had already fled.

As Duprès left the church, overcome by irresistible temptation, he snatched up a gold vessel from the floor.

Before he could conceal the treasure a man near him saw it and smote it out of his hand, at the same time striking the skryer a blow that made him stagger.

"No thieves in this company!" he shouted; "we are not thieves but avengers!"

XI - THE PRINCE RESIGNS

Ever since he had, on the fall of Cardinal Granvelle, risen to prominence in the governing of the Netherlands, William of Orange had endeavoured to steer between party and party, to behave with moderation and temperance, to extend one hand to the Catholics

and one to the Reformers and lead both to concord.

He had never associated himself with the violent party of 'Beggars' which Brederode had formed, and to which Count Louis and Ste Aldegonde belonged; at the same time he had resolutely refused to lend his civil authority to enforce religious persecution, and had protested again and again in Council, and in open letter, against the establishment of the Inquisition and the overthrow of the ancient laws of the Netherlands.

This steadfast and just attitude had given him a power during the troubles which followed the enforcement of the Edicts of the Council of Trent which not one of his colleagues possessed; the people had looked to him as a possible champion, the Regent had thrust on him all the most arduous tasks, and all had regarded him as the only man able (if any man were able) to bring about a settlement between Philip and his subjects.

And in this high, arduous, and delicate position the Prince laboured sincerely, wisely, and earnestly, without thought of self-seeking, of disloyalty to the King, or to the Netherlands.

The Duchess, in her terror, her confusion, her powerlessness, leant on his strength almost entirely.

He had gone to Antwerp after the image-breaking, and restored such order there that service was held in the desecrated building the following Sunday; by his presence he had brought about tranquillity in his own provinces of Holland and Zeeland; he had drawn up the Accord of 24th August by which the Duchess, terrified almost into flight by the mania of image-breaking that had swept over the country, granted permission for free preaching on the part of the heretics, and it was he who had seen that she kept her promises when she tried to evade them; it was he who had influenced

Brederode to some quietness; he who had counselled all men on all occasions to patience and moderation.

In all these things he had acted more for Philip's interests, in a manner more calculated to save Philip's crown, than had any servant of the King, even Granvelle, beloved of the Escorial.

But he had acted with open eyes, without hope of praise or reward, and knowing perfectly well that his energetic and honest services would go for nothing, and that, by refusing implicit obedience in the matter of the Inquisition, he and the others who had acted with him were for ever damned in the eyes of Philip.

He knew too that the Regent only used him, that she neither trusted nor confided in him; she went back on his actions, tied his hands in a hundred ways, recalled one day the concession she had permitted him to offer the day before, made him the shield of her imperious weakness and her vacillating terror.

He knew that she even wrote to Philip denouncing him as a traitor and at heart a heretic whose design in all he did was self-aggrandizement; none the less in all crises of trouble and confusion she summoned him and relied on him.

And the Prince had served her, for in so doing he believed he served the Netherlands; it was still his dream to bring about some concord which would render the coming of Alva needless.

But now the fact was brought home to him that he could no longer occupy an ambiguous position; before him lay a letter from Margaret containing a copy of the new oath for his signature, and her request that he take this oath without delay.

William half smiled as he contemplated the two sheets of paper; it

was such a childish, malicious, gratuitous trick on Philip's part, and yet it served so well to test every man in his service.

And it put the astute Prince, who had walked so long and so carefully between extremes, to the necessity of having to choose one way or another.

For this new oath which had arrived from Madrid instead of the long-promised King himself, instead of the definite news for which Margaret was so impatiently waiting, consisted of a pledge that he, who was in the services of His Majesty, was to hold himself bound to serve and obey the Government in any place, against any person, without exception or restriction.

The Cardinalists had all taken this oath, and so, after some hesitation, had Egmont.

And now it lay before William in his room in his castle at Breda, where his household now was, and to which he had returned after a journey round the towns of his provinces.

Closed now was the gorgeous mansion in Brussels whose hospitality and magnificence had been one of the wonders of the capital; over were those days of luxury and gaiety, feasting and thoughtlessness.

The Prince's household was now reduced to about a hundred and fifty persons; he was more than ever in need of money, and his debts increased.

But he had recently refused a present of money from the States of Holland as a thank-offering for his efforts in establishing peace in that province; he did not wish anything he did to be laid open to the charge of personal interest.

Rising and going to the window, with that impulse that always sends men to the light when in deep thought, he stood looking out on the grey March sky, the grey walls of the castle, and the bare trees.

With the two papers--the formula of the oath and the Regent's letter--in his hand, he reviewed his position.

One point in his circumstances was salient beyond all others--his utter isolation.

He had last seen the two nobles, Egmont and Hoorne who were his rivals in greatness and prestige, and had been united to him by so warm a friendship--at Diendermonde, when he, exasperated by the Regent's falseness and particularly by her action in sending Eric of Brunswick with troops to the towns that were within the Lordship of Orange, had urged Egmont to take a definite stand against the Government.

The Stadtholder of Flanders had refused; he was finally and definitely pledged to Philip.

And Hoorne, though he had acted justly towards the Reformers in Tournay--where he had been in authority during his brother's absence--and though he was embittered by the ruined condition of his fortunes and Philip's neglect, still remained sullenly loyal to Spain.

Montigny wrote from Madrid an account of Philip's wrath at the image-breaking, the Accord, and the public speaking, and expressed his own surprise and disgust at these outrages on the ancient faith.

Louis of Nassau and Ste Aldegonde were now outside the scope of the Prince's influence and entirely at one with Brederode, who was enclosed in his hereditary town of Vianen which he appeared to be

fortifying, and with his party were most of the younger nobles, Culemburg, Van der Berg, De Hammes, and their fellows.

William of Orange stood quite alone.

And he had come to a juncture when he must either go into open opposition to the King or pledge himself to be his unquestioning instrument.

He was largely as one feeling his way in the dark with regard to the policy of Margaret and Philip, but he guessed the faces of the cards so carefully concealed; if he stooped to take the oath it would not be likely to save him when the time came for Philip to strike.

The Prince hated Philip well, but he was able to judge him with an especial clearness; he was convinced in his heart that the King had already judged and condemned all these Netherlanders who had in any way opposed him.

At the Diendermonde meeting he had shown to Egmont and Hoorne an intercepted letter from D'Alava, Spanish envoy in Paris, to the Regent.

In this document was very plainly set forth the King's intention towards the three grandees, who were to be arrested the moment a Spanish army reached the Netherlands, and the writer further stated that the two envoys in Madrid "are met with smiling faces, but will be never permitted to leave Spain alive."

Egmont put this letter before the Regent, who declared it to be an impudent forgery; with this statement Egmont was satisfied.

But the Prince of Orange was not; even were the letter false he believed that it contained the true sentiments of the Government.

There was no one to share his views, to understand his attitude; he felt that very keenly now, when he stood at the parting of the ways.

Brederode and Louis thought him hesitating and cold, the Count party thought him disloyal, the people no longer trusted him; his German relatives were lukewarm in their attachment, his wife never saw him but she railed and scolded at the way he had allowed himself to be ruined for a parcel of heretics, and deafened him with complaints of the life at Breda castle.

The only man standing by him at that moment was Anthony Lalaing, Count Hoogstraaten, the gallant young noble who had been his right hand in the troublous Antwerp days.

But Hoogstraaten was at the Prince's feet, waiting to be instructed; he was nothing on which to lean.

Again William looked at the two papers which the March wind fluttered in his hand.

If he declared against Philip, what could he do?

What possible chance had the Reformers against Spain?

Valenciennes, which had dared to rebel, had been reduced to misery and desolation; Noircames had put to death some thousands of the inhabitants; a garrison had been sent to Tournay; Egmont was forcing troops on all the towns of Artois and Flanders; the famous confederacy of the beggars was broken; Brederode was making a burlesque of resistance.

De Hammes was breaking images and feeding his parrot with holy wafers--a rope of sand, indeed, there!

And would the German Princes move in the cause of their fellow

Protestants?

This was doubtful, as they were bitterly divided among themselves--some being Lutherans, some Calvinists.

Then the Emperor, though inclined to acknowledge the Reformation, was bitter against the Calvinists, and this sect was in the majority among the Reformers of the Netherlands.

Nor was it likely that he would embroil himself with Spain for the sake of the oppressed provinces.

There was the Huguenot party in France, but they had their own battles to fight, their own ground to maintain; there was a Protestant Queen in England, but she was cautious, and ardent for peace, and not likely to go to war for the sake of religion.

It seemed to William that Philip had the Netherlands under his heel to crush as he pleased.

The Prince turned back to his writing-table and took up his pen.

For himself, what was this step going to cost?

Gradually the old magnificent life had changed, the splendid young noble had become the grave man of affairs. Still not much over thirty, and endowed with a warm and joyous temperament, used to wealth and power, pleasure and luxury, he found himself about to take up a position in which all these things must be foregone.

Looking back over the brief years since his second marriage, he saw how slow, how subtle had been this change in himself and in his surroundings; looking ahead, he saw that the coming change would be marked and swift--and terrible.

He smiled as he retailed the Jousts, the tourneys, the feasts, the hunts, the dances--those days were over.

It had been a silent, secret struggle between him and Philip ever since that monarch had left the Netherlands.

But now it would be secret and silent no longer.

The Prince flung down his gage to the King.

Mending his quill and drawing a sheet of paper towards him, he wrote to Madame Parma returning the oath, and resigning all his offices.

"As His Majesty now writes that all officers and servants, with no exception, must subscribe to this oath, or be discharged from his service, I must consider myself of the latter number, and will retire for a time until His Majesty comes to these provinces himself to obtain a true judgment of affairs.

"Therefore, I pray Your Highness, send some gentleman to me with proper papers of dismissal, to whom I may deliver my commission, assuring you at the same time that I will never fail in my service to this country for the good of this land."

So with words that were gentle and courteous, as habitual with him, he phrased his resolution.

"No longer Philip's servant, no longer his servant," he said to himself as he sealed the letter; "and now, what next?"

Himself, he did not know. His resignation of his offices left him almost a ruined man, but it left him free.

He sighed like a man from whose shoulders a burden has been

lifted, locked away his letter, rose and went down to the castle grounds.

He could see the little town clustered round the great church; the winding river with low horse-burdened bridge, all grey in the grey air and lashed by the March wind.

He leant against one of the ramparts which rose up, forming a wall to the garden, and his keen grave eyes rested on the church.

Free of Philip's service--what of Philip's faith? The House of Nassau was Protestant; he had assumed the Romish Faith to please the Emperor, but he had been born and educated in the Reformed Faith.

As he looked down at the church he thought of that.

Never had he considered religion much; it had been merely part of the ceremony of his life, the custom of every gentleman. Now he began to consider, not religion, but God.

And it seemed to him God was not guiding Philip's councils, nor inspiring the persecutions of the Inquisition.

Might He not rather be favourable towards these poor people who were paying with their lives for their desire to worship Him as they wished?

William's mind was tolerant and liberal, it had never been confined in the elaborate ceremonies of the Romish Church, nor could it ever subscribe wholly to the fanaticism of the extreme Protestants, like Ste Aldegonde; but of late he had sickened against the show and pretension, the cruelty and bigotry, the avarice and falseness shown by the professors of the ancient faith, and had turned naturally to the sterner, simpler creed that was struggling so hard for existence.

The Prince could not believe that God or Truth were wholly on one side or the other, but his sympathy and taste turned, every day more certainly, towards the oppressed, the miserable, the helpless Reformers.

He had not stood long looking over Breda before he was joined by Hoogstraaten, now his guest.

The two young men did not speak; they stood side by side looking over the grey town and the grey church.

The keen wind lifted the little locks on the Prince's temples and showed the faint streaks of white that now mingled with the dark chestnut.

Near by, in the still bare garden, Rénée le Meung was searching for the first faint sprays of green; with a sad little bouquet of these trembling promises of spring in her hand, she stood silent, with tears in her eyes, looking at the Prince, who did not notice her at all, but continued to gaze at the great church of Breda.

XII - ORANGE AND EGMONT

The Regent, more and more in a dilemma, refused to accept the Prince's resignation; indeed, shortly after he had offered it she implored him to again go to Antwerp, where Calvinists and Lutherans were embroiling the city.

William went, arriving after the disastrous engagement of Ostrawell, when a band of fiery Calvinists under Ste Aldegonde's brother, Jean de Marnix, had been utterly cut to pieces, their gallant young leader being the first to fall.

William had come in time to prevent an internecine war that would

have devastated the city; at great peril to himself he had prevented the two Protestant sects from flying at each other's throats, and actually restored order in Antwerp and induced the crowd to say after him, "Vive le roi!"

But he knew that all he did was useless; when the English Envoy congratulated him on his splendid labours, he replied: "But it will not please the King; I know there is nothing of this that will please the King,"

It did not even please the Regent; too many concessions had been made to the heretics, too much gentleness shown. She preferred the way Egmont had treated Valenciennes, which had been reduced to a complete and bloody silence; and the method of Noircames, of Meghem, of Aremberg, who, rejoicing at the approach of a profitable civil war, were desolating the country, crushing the heretic with an iron hand, and sweeping his property into their own pockets.

Yet Margaret still refused to accept the resignation that William tendered again and again; she still clung to his strength and authority, even while she denounced him in every letter she wrote to Philip.

Perhaps, too, she guessed that Philip had his vengeance ready for the Prince of Orange, and that he would be wroth with her if the illustrious victim was suffered to escape.

For Margaret was sincere in nothing but her desire to serve her brother, and true to nothing save to that brother and the Romish Church.

She tried all her arts to induce the Prince to remain in the King's service: she sent him a flattering letter, appealing to "his noble heart, his illustrious and loyal descent, his duty to King and country"; she

invited him to Brussels, to a meeting of the Knights of the Golden Fleece; and when he declined both, she sent Berty, secretary of the State Council, to the Prince at Antwerp.

Berty's feeble and formal rhetoric had no effect whatever on the Prince, unless it caused him to glimpse more clearly than ever the trap that was being so carefully set.

He knew that Philip was not coming to the Netherlands, but that Alva was within a few days of starting for Brussels with the finest army in Europe at his back.

And while he listened to the specious Berty prating of loyalty and the King's goodness, he had in his pocket a letter from that sturdy old Landgrave Philip who had opposed his marriage with Anne, but who had since become his friend.

The Landgrave had been lured into a long captivity by the arts of Granvelle and Alva, as he now reminded William.

"Let them not smear your mouths with honey," he wrote. "If the three seigneurs, of whom the Duchess Margaret has so much to say, are invited to Court by Alva under pretext of friendly consultation, let them be wary and think twice ere they accept. I know the Duke of Alva and the Spaniards, and how they dealt with me."

The only concession Berty could obtain from the Prince was his consent to once more meet Egmont, Mansfeld, and Aerschot.

The interview was arranged to take place at a village outside Antwerp, named Willebroek; and William, with but a couple of grooms, rode out there one morning in early April.

It was a pleasure to him to ride across the fresh country, to feel the soft turf beneath his horse's feet, to see the mild blue sky overhead.

and about him all the new greenery--on briar, hedge, and tree, where the birds fluttered among the leaves.

The lovely morning air on his face reminded him of grand days at the chase; it was long now since he had ridden out with hawk and hounds.

This part of the country was as yet unscathed by famine or bands of mercenaries; the grain was sprouting in the fields, the brown and white cows wandered in the pastures, the little farms were undisturbed amid the groves of budding poplar and willow trees, the peasants went to and fro about their work as if they had never heard of Ostrawell and Valenciennes and the coming of Alva.

The little village of Willebroek lay peaceful beneath the early sun; the white houses with green shutters, painted fronts, and tiled roofs, the limes in the marketplace just clouded with green, the church with the lead spire, the canal with the arched wooden bridge, up which the flat barges were slowly making way against the stream, all combined to make an image of plenty, ease, and prosperity.

William drew rein before the inn, where he was to meet the other seigneurs. He felt light-hearted; he looked up into the blue air; he smiled at a group of children who were going by with their hands full of the pearly blossoms of hawthorn.

The inn was an old building with a red tiled roof, rising, step by step, into a point under which was an alcove where a white figure of the Madonna stood against a blue and gold glory.

The green shutters were all laid back to disclose the clean shining windows; the door stood open, showing a long dark brick passage, and through another open door at the end a glimpse of a sunny garden with pigeons.

This garden spread either side the house and was filled with young fruit trees, the dark pink bloom of the peach mingling with the warm white of plum and pear.

In the windows of the inn stood glazed pots of a shining green and yellow, filled with gilliflowers and striped pink; a girl in a blue dress was hanging out linen on a box hedge beyond the fruit trees.

William noticed all these things with a great keenness; everything he saw, everything he did or said now was memorable, for all belonged to a portion of his life that would so soon be over.

He entered the modest house, and the awed innkeeper showed him into the parlour.

It was a low, spacious, cool room, full of the fragrance and sounds of the garden and shaded by a little beech tree, the fresh clear green leaves of which swept the leaded panes of the window.

The floor was smooth brick, the walls dark and polished, the ceiling beamed; on shelves and on the large bureau stood silver tankards, coloured pottery, and painted glasses shaped like bells and flowers.

In the empty fireplace the brass andirons gleamed golden, in the centre of the large round wooden table stood four brass candlesticks, a snuffer and tray.

At this table sat Lamoral Egmont, his head resting on his hand.

The nobility of his figure, the extreme richness of his dress, the gallant handsomeness of his face, ill accorded with the clean, neat, and humble room.

He wore violet and silver and a mantle of a tawny orange colour that

fell over the brick floor; his charming head was framed by a ruff of silver gauze; his weapons were many and elaborate; by him on the table lay his hat, a pistol, his gloves and whip.

On the other side of the table sat Count Mansfeld, an elderly man of no particular presence, handsomely attired in black and gold; while within the window embrasure was the insignificant figure of Secretary Berty.

The Prince gently closed the door and stood smiling at all three.

His slight figure, plainly habited in a brown riding suit, soft high boots, and a falling ruff; his small head, held erect without pride, and valiantly without arrogance; his dark face, with the regular features and laughing eyes--the whole man, so composed, so pleasant, so unfathomable, seemed to strangely impress the three who waited for him--to impress them almost with uneasiness.

Lamoral Egmont rose, filling the room with his magnificence.

"We meet strangely, Prince," he said.

William greeted all with even courtesy, then took his seat at the round table, placing his hands, half concealed by the linen ruffles, before him on the smooth surface as he had placed them in the council chamber at Brussels when the letters from Philip had been read enforcing the decrees of the Council of Trent.

Mansfeld had never been close in his friendship, and always a warm upholder of the Government; Berty was little other than Margaret's spy; it was to Egmont the Prince addressed himself.

"You have come to persuade me," he said gently. "Speak, Count, speak."

Egmont flushed; despite his loyalty and his now firm attachment to Spanish rule, he always felt uneasy in the presence of the man who had once so influenced him and who now was divided from him by an ever-widening gulf.

He repeated the arguments of Berty, endeavouring to enforce them by the weight of his own belief and his own friendship for the Prince.

He spoke verbosely, emphasizing his meaning with many illustrations and continually praising the King.

A bee buzzed in the window-pane the while, evading Berty's furtive fingers; it made as much impression on the Prince as did the words of Lamoral Egmont.

But he listened civilly, keeping his dark eyes steadily on the speaker's face; but when at last Egmont had finished, he threw back his head with a little laugh and spoke a few words that tossed all the Count's formal phrases back at him as useless.

"Oh, Egmont!" he cried. "I did not ride from Antwerp to be persuaded, but to persuade. What you have said can never move me. Would that what I say could move you !--"

Egmont made no reply; he glanced at Berty, and slightly shrugged his shoulders.

But Mansfeld spoke.

"Then what are the intentions of Your Highness?" he asked, with some haughtiness.

"My intentions are well known," answered the Prince simply. "I have resigned all my offices. And I shall leave the Netherlands."

Egmont started.

"Leave the Netherlands!" he cried.

"Do you think," answered William, "that I will resign, make myself a rebel, and then wait the coming of the Duke of Alva?"

"Take the oaths," said Mansfeld, "and withdraw your resignations. We and the Regent alike entreat you to this."

William moved back in his chair and turned his head so as to face Mansfeld.

"Once and for ever, Count," he said, and from behind his pleasant calm there flashed the strength of an immovable purpose, "I declare I will not take an oath which is against my honour, an oath that makes me a tool, an executioner. Is William of Orange,"—his voice was suddenly angry—"to await the orders of the Duke of Alva? To be the servant of the Inquisition?"

Egmont flushed, thinking of Valenciennes and the many poor Christians he had slain there, and of the old days when he and Orange had been one in protesting against the Inquisition.

"You mock at loyalty," he said gloomily, "but you go to your ruin. If you leave the Netherlands, your property will be confiscated."

"If I stay, I shall lose more than my estates," replied William. "I will sooner encounter all that may happen from this my action than sacrifice my conscience by the taking of this oath. No more of it."

"Then we talk in vain," said Mansfeld sternly.

"On that subject, yes," answered the Prince. "But I would further speak to Count Egmont." He looked at his friend earnestly, and

spoke with a certain passion. "Oh, Lamoral Egmont, give your loyalty to your native land and not to Spain. Come with me; I will follow you. I will be your faithful soldier--risk everything in a good cause rather than in a bad one. I was grieved the victor of St. Quentin and Gravelines should come to the massacring of poor artisans; but that may be redeemed. Strike for freedom, Count, not for tyranny."

"You speak treason," cried Egmont, with some heat. "I am loyal, and will keep that loyalty unstained."

"It shall not avail you," returned William, in a moved tone. "Do you think Philip has forgotten or Philip forgiven? Do you think Alva comes to caress you, bringing in his hands riches and honours? I tell you he comes to strike down all those who have offended Spain, and you are one of them."

"I have no fear," answered the Stadtholder of Flanders stoutly. "I do not dread to see the country in the hands of the Spaniards, nor to welcome the Duke of Alva."

"No one need fear who has a clear conscience," added Mansfeld.

"Seigneur," said the Prince impatiently, "you speak like a child. You are safe because you were one of Granvelle's partisans--Egmont was the Cardinal's enemy; Egmont has done many things well noted in Madrid. I tell you he is doomed if he stays he is doomed as surely as any poor peasant who has looked impudently at an image."

"These are the words of a rebel!" exclaimed Mansfeld.

"For the true service of the King I am always ready," returned William, "but to Alva, Granvelle, and the Inquisition call me rebel if you will for I do protest against them and their authority and all attempts to force the faith of these people, which attempts are in

defiance of laws and privileges and wholly against God."

"Nay," said Egmont, "it is His cause, as any priest will tell you."

"I spoke of God, not of priests," answered the Prince.

"This is bold saying," remarked Mansfeld. "Has the insolent blasphemy of Calvin or Luther found so high a convert? Has the raving, vulgar fury of the field-preacher shaken the faith of the Prince of Orange?"

Mansfeld spoke with bitter irony and his face coloured with indignation.

William smiled.

"Ah, I am studying theology!" he said. "I may find comfort from Geneva as easily as from Rome when I have finished my learning."

He looked straightly at Mansfeld.

"I was bred a heretic," he added.

Mansfeld rose.

"Enough," he said. "I see this conference is useless."

William rose also; he went to Egmont and laid his hands affectionately on the Count's shoulders.

"I do not take this action thoughtlessly nor suddenly," he said, "but after deep reflection and long weighing of events; I know I lower my fortunes and jeopardize my estates--yet I do the wiser thing. I beseech you by our ancient friendship, by our common charge, for the sake of those dear to you, to follow my example. I entreat you not

to wait the coming of Alva."

But Lamoral Egmont was not to be moved. His lodestar was Spain; and now he had Mansfeld watching him and Berty noting down every word he said, his reply was curt, almost wrathful.

"I have an easy conscience; and if I have committed some faults I rely on the clemency of the King--I lean on His Majesty."

"Alas!" said William, "you lean on what will destroy you. You boast yourself secure in the King's clemency, and so lull yourself with a security which does not exist. Would that I might be deceived, but I foresee only too clearly that you are to be the bridge which the Spaniards will destroy as soon as they have passed over it to invade our country,"

With that he ended, somewhat abruptly, as if he indeed saw that it was useless to try and open Egmont's eyes to his danger, and turning away picked up his mantle and hat as if to end a hopeless argument.

"You will be the ruined man, not I," remarked Egmont in some agitation; "it is you who throw everything away for a shadow!"

William moved towards the door.

"Will you not dine with us?" asked Mansfeld formally.

"Nay," replied the Prince. "I am pressed to return to Antwerp."

With Egmont he would have gladly stayed, but he had no mind to eat and drink with Mansfeld and Berty.

He took his farewells. Egmont looked at him a little wistfully; mutual affection had gone deep into the hearts of each.

The Count had moved to the door, and as William passed he advanced a step.

The Prince turned and suddenly embraced him, clasping him for a second to his heart; then with tears in his eyes he left the room.

There were tears too on Egmont's cheek.

"He looked at me as if he thought never to see me again!" he said.

"A landless, exiled, powerless man," remarked Mansfeld. "How low is the great Prince of Orange fallen!"

A little maid entered the room to prepare the dinner; she looked with wonder and reverence at the three gentlemen, who had none of them revealed their identity.

"Oh, seigneurs!" she said, "who is the young cavalier who has just ridden away? He never saluted the Virgin above the door, and in these days--!"

Mansfeld glanced at Egmont.

"You may call him, my child, many names, for he had many honours; now you had best call him--the Heretic," he said dryly.

XIII - THE COMING OF ALVA

Rénée Le Meung moved about the fine apartments of the Princess in Breda Castle, sorting clothes, arranging bags and boxes, and packing the long coffers that were to be carried into the courtyard and there loaded on the baggage mules.

Alva was coming; he had already sailed from Carthagena.

And William of Orange and his household were leaving the Netherlands for Germany, there to take up residence with his mother and Count John in the castle of Dillenburg.

As Rénée moved about her task, she vividly recalled how she had left Germany, that hot, weary day of the feast in Leipsic, when she had moved about among Anne's things as she was moving now, folding away the bridal dresses, locking away the bridal trinkets with the sound of the joy bells in her ears and the flare of the joy fires reflected in the window-panes.

She recalled how she had crept into the gallery overlooking the great hall and had seen the Prince and Princess seated side by side on the gold couch, receiving the homage of the maskers, and all her own fatigue and distaste, the close perfumed air of the Town Hall, and the rich scents of the feast.

She had been reluctant to leave Germany, which had been a peaceful refuge, and to return to her own country, which for her was dark with horrible memories; and now she was not sorry that this Brussels life had ended--a life of magnificence, which she had only glimpsed from behind the windows of Anne's apartments; a life of great affairs and tremendous events, which she had only heard of from the mouths of pages and servants; a life of continued service, of self-denial, of submission to caprice and tyranny.

Now it was over, and she would go to Dillenburg, where every one was Protestant, and be' near the Prince's mother and sisters, who perhaps would be kind to her and notice what she was doing for Anne.

Her starved heart was greedy for kindness and praise.

She was glad, too, that Anne was leaving the Netherlands without having again seen Jan Rubens or Duprès; she felt the Princess would be safe in Dillenburg.

Yet Rénée was sad; she could not be happy leaving behind her a country so broken, so oppressed, so desolate.

She heard men mention Alva with awe and terror; she saw that the Prince was departing before he came; and she feared even worse things for the Netherlands than their present great calamities.

But her piety had strengthened; her body, denied and rendered subject to her soul, grew weaker, and the soul within became stronger, and so nearer God.

She trusted in Him not to forsake His people, and she believed in William of Orange as His Captain.

The gorgeous young Papist cavalier whom she had looked on for the first time at Leipsic on his wedding day, whom she had thought frivolous and worldly, was now become the man on whom centred all her hopes for her country and her faith.

Other and reckless men had taken up the people's cause and won the people's heart—men like Brederode, Count Louis, Ste Aldegonde, and De Hammes; but though these were the names shouted in the market-place, Rénée had given no heed to them at all.

It was to the Prince, who was, nominally at least, still a Papist, who had acted until the very last in fulfilment of his duty to the King, who had checked the fervour of the Reformers and was even hated by the Calvinists for his behaviour after the engagement at Ostrawell—it was to him that Rénée confidently looked to save the Netherlands.

And that confidence, strengthened by her woman's devotion to a

person beloved, supported her in this second flight from her native country.

She was so lost in thought as she went about her task that it was with a little start that she became aware of the presence of another in the chamber.

Anne was standing in the door of the inner room.

She leant against the wooden lintel and stared at Rénèe. The white linen round her head and shoulders made her face look yellow and faded as that of an old woman; her blue dress clung to her meagre figure in straight lines; there was no attempt now to hide her deformity of raised shoulder and crooked hip; her hands pulled nervously at her girdle.

"Your labour is for nothing," she said. "I am not going to Dillenburg."

Rénèe went on packing.

"Your Highness will certainly go," she answered quietly.

"No," said Anne violently. "I was a fool to leave Brussels--but I will not leave the Netherlands. Why should I go into exile? Where is all my state? It has melted like snow. There is no one to look after me; I can hardly get a drink of beer or wine when I want it. *He* never gives me any money--has he thrown it all away on this miserable beggar war? I will not be the wife of a ruined man--am I to live on wind and eat my hands and feet? By God, I had better have married a simple German Count than this great Prince."

The resignation of the Prince and the subsequent alteration in his fortunes might certainly have frightened many women; but Rénèe had no spark of sympathy for Anne's complainings and railings.

"Your Highness came to Breda, and Your Highness will go to Dillenburg."

Anne gave her a look of hate.

"I would sooner stay and put myself at the mercy of Alva," answered the Princess sullenly. "I do not fear the Spaniards."

"His Highness has decided to leave the Netherlands," said Rénée, with an air of finality.

Anne limped towards her.

"You hate me, don't you?" she asked, with some eagerness. "You said you hated me, once."

"I would have loved you, Madame, but you would not permit it and--and some of your actions I needs must hate."

"Well, set yourself free of me," urged the Princess. "Help me to escape I have friends in Cologne--I want to go to Cologne."

"Duprès and Rubens are there," was the thought that instantly stabbed Rénée; she turned white and could not speak.

"There are some gentlewomen there I know," continued Anne. "I want to go there help me escape. I will give you anything you wish for--"

"Oh, Highness, Highness," cried Rénée, "you speak like a child. It is impossible for you to go to Cologne, or anywhere save to Dillenburg with His Highness."

Anne sat on the edge of the long box Rénée was filling with clothes. Her pale blue eyes wandered round the room with a painful vacancy.

"I wish I were dead," she said foolishly. "I have never been happy."

Rénée looked at her with an amazement not untouched with bitterness, for it was the wife of William of Orange who spoke so--a woman who had everything through the mere accident of birth, while she--! The beautiful young Fleming smiled ironically as she thought of herself and her poor life.

"Why are you not happy, Madame?" she asked. "You have all there is in the world--ease and friends and greatness--your children--the Prince."

"Yes," said Anne, with sudden sharpness, "but I am an ugly crooked woman whom no one loves."

Rénée held her breath, it gave her a strange sensation to hear the Princess thus describe herself; she had always thought vanity completely blinded Anne.

"You thought I did not know?" continued her mistress, with that sudden look and tone of intelligence so painfully in contrast with her usual wildness. "I always knew. I had nothing from the beginning. You hated me--so did every one. When I thought *he* loved me I nearly went mad with joy. But he had married me for ambition, of course."

Rénée, in her confusion of thoughts, felt impelled to defend the Prince, as if, for the first time, she saw some glimmer of justice in Anne's point of view.

"These great marriages are not made for love," she said.

"I was sixteen," remarked Anne drily. "I did not know anything."

"You could have made His Highness care," urged Renée.

"Not with this face and body," said the Princess curtly.

"And he has been loyal to you," continued Anne, "and gentle and patient."

Anne shrugged her shoulders.

"I shall never be happy here. If he had loved me," she said, with brutal frankness, "he might have changed me--but he never did--and for his kindness, did I want that? He is kind to every one, he finds it the easier way. I have always been curst. I wish I were dead; and now we are ruined too."

"Consider, Madame, the Prince has made these sacrifices to help the Reformers, and you are a Lutheran."

"Lutheran or Papist are nothing to me," answered Anne, "nor God either--why did He make women curst and crooked?"

She lifted her head, and, seeing Rénée with her arms full of clothes, she called out imperiously, "Put down those things! I will never leave the Netherlands!"

As she spoke the Prince entered; Anne rose and faced him with the look of an adversary.

"My wife," he said at once, "I come to implore you to hasten."

Anne's face hardened into compressed lips and puckered brows until it was like an ugly wax mask.

"News?" she asked briefly.

"Yes, I have received a letter from one of my agents in Spain," (he did not mention that this agent was Vandenesse, the King's private

secretary), "and he tells me that my arrest is resolved upon the moment Alva reaches the Netherlands--and that my trial is not to last more than twenty-four hours."

"But they would do nothing to me," said Anne sullenly.

"Before God, Madame, I entreat you to hasten! Are you not a Lutheran and the Elector Maurice's daughter, and do you hope to stand in Alva's good graces?"

A slight tremor shook Anne.

"It does not please me to go to Dillenburg," she muttered.

William flushed.

"You remind me that I have no other house to offer you," he said. "I must entreat your patience, Anne."

"Let me go to Cologne," answered the Princess. "I think you could well spare me."

"It is not possible. Our separation would cause a scandal, and is there need to put our affairs in every man's mouth? And at this juncture of my affairs I cannot well afford two households."

This drove Anne into one of her sudden furies.

"Ah yes," she cried. "You are ruined in this miserable intrigue! Why could you not remain loyal? This is all the doing of Count Louis--I always hated him; little did you think of me when you suffered yourself to be led away by his boy's tricks!"

William looked at her steadily.

"What I do is according to my conscience," he said quietly, "but that I think you do not comprehend. Yet let me tell you this: a man situated as I am, who sees nothing but troubles before him, could find no greater comfort than a patient wife who took her difficulties lightly. But that comfort, I fear, I shall never have from you."

"And what comfort shall I get from anyone?" asked Anne wildly.

She flung into the inner chamber, harshly closing the door after her so that the panels rattled.

Rénée felt the tears sting her eyes at the misery, the wretchedness of it all; what was wrong, she wondered, that things should be like this?

"See to these affairs, my child," said the Prince, pointing to the confusion in the chamber, "we must indeed be gone to-morrow."

"All is nearly ready, Highness," answered Rénée; "the men may come when they will for the coffers. And I think the Princess will come quietly--she is frightened."

"She is in a melancholy," said William, "she has not all her wits. A fine discord she will strike in Dillenburg," he added grimly. "I had hoped, these humours would pass with her youth, but it is not so."

Anne was still only twenty-four, but no one thought of her as young.

"It is a sickness," answered Rénée, "she is never well, seigneur, but always ailing and often in pain."

"I know, and therefore I forbear many things," he said.

She looked at his face that was tired and pale but absolutely composed and serene, and she saw that he had long since gauged Anne's value and that she did not trouble him.

"You are glad to return to Germany?" he suddenly asked Rénèe.

She flushed brightly.

"I am glad to think that Your Highness will return to the Netherlands," she answered boldly.

"You think I shall?"

"Yes--for who else is there to withstand Alva and Philip?"

"You still make a champion of me," he smiled. "Belike you think of me as a heretic?"

"Men call you that, Highness."

"My enemies."

"Your friends could find no nobler name," answered Rénèe.

She stood erect, gazing at him, and the joy and terror she had in his presence and her intense love for her country and her faith fired her beauty with an ardent life that made her glow like a brilliant flower.

All her lovelinesses, always neglected and ignored, were suddenly triumphant.

"If Your Highness, would but listen to the cries of the poor Netherlanders!" she said. "They say you would have followed Count Egmont if he had raised his standard for the people--will you not go on alone?"

"Against Philip?" William smiled. "Child, you think too much of politics. When we are in Germany I will find you a husband who will

relieve you from this stern service."

She turned away wistfully.

"I am always overbold," she murmured; "it is my folly."

The Prince touched her lightly on the shoulder. "Hold up your heart. I, too, love the Netherlands and hope to serve them. And maybe I might accomplish something—even against Spain. God guides it all, surely."

He left her, and Rénée went on with her task, selecting, folding, putting away; the little German girl came to help her, and two others of the Princess's women went to and fro the long suite of apartments with clothes and caskets in their hands.

The dusk fell, the candles were lit; the Ave Maria rose from the great church of Breda, the dark closed in, and the shutters were fastened over the spring night, and still the preparations for departure went on from garret to cellar.

In the library the Prince was writing his farewell letters to Egmont and Hoorne; in her chamber Anne lay prostrate and sullen on her huge brocaded bed; in all the rooms the servants and attendants worked, packing up the furniture and household goods.

There was much that had to be left behind. There was much that had been utterly abandoned, as the greater part of the rich appointments of the gorgeous Brussels hotel, and it was but a modest train that started on the morrow for Cleves, the first stage of the journey.

But as they proceeded their number was continually swelled by crowds of fugitives and refugees who threw themselves on the protection of the Prince of Orange, and fled from the coming of Alva, whose name was beginning to sound over the provinces like the

sound of a curse, and whose shadow was flung dark before him, like the shadow of death.

XIV - PHILIP'S AVENGERS

From Carthagera to Genoa, hence to San Ambrosio, over the Alps to Mont Cenis, through Savoy, Burgundy, and Louvaine came the army of the Duke of Alva, watched by a French army, watched by a Swiss army, taking no heed of either, steadily pursuing their way to the rebellious provinces.

At every stopping-place they were met by messages from the Duchess, entreating them to stay, saying their coming would unchain a war of religion, protesting against this coming of an armed force into a country already quieted by pacific means. Two motives influenced Margaret in these protestations: she was indignant at being superseded by Alva, after her long and bitter toils in the service of her brother had at last met with some success; and now, at the final issue, she was frightened at what putting the provinces under Spanish soldiers might mean. She even wrote to Philip expressing her opinion of the fatal consequences likely to follow Alva's invasion.

But the King took no notice of these complaints, and Alva only smiled at the letters of an agitated woman who was suddenly trying to quench the flame she had so recklessly fanned, and continued his steady march towards the Netherlands.

On a hot night in the middle of August a charcoal burner, who lived in the forest of Thionville on the frontier between Luxemburg and the Netherlands, was roused by sounds unusual indeed in that solitude, and creeping out of his bed he came out into the moonlight, his frightened family behind him, and, hiding behind the thick trees,

gazed down on to the road a mere narrow defile that ran through the immense forest, which on one side sloped away and on the other rose into the ledge where the poor peasant hid.

It was a most gorgeous night, the moon hung like a plate of soft gold in the deep purple heavens and shed a radiance, too warm for silver, through the close branches of the stately trees, in full summer luxuriance, that spread to right and left, before and behind, on all sides bounding the vision.

The air was warm but not oppressive, now and then a little ripple of wind shook the undergrowth, the brambles, the daisies, the poppies, the foxgloves, and the thick fragrant grasses. The stillness had been complete, but now it was broken by the ever increasing sound of the tramp of feet and the jingling of harness; and soon the vanguard of Alva's army was revealed.

They had raised their last encampment with the rising of the moon that they might the sooner set foot in the Netherlands.

The charcoal-burner knew nothing of this, he did not even know whose army he looked upon; he trembled and crossed himself and clung tightly to his children, while he crouched down in a bed of foxgloves behind a huge beech and peered, with an awe-struck curiosity, at this new and terrible sight.

Alva's army was not large, being no more than ten thousand men, but these ten thousand were the most famous veterans in the world, and both their organization and equipment were perfect, while there was no general in the world whose fame equalled that of Ferdinando Alvarez de Toledo, the great Duke of Alva.

The vanguard of this army, as it hastened through the forest of Thionville, consisted of two of the Italian regiments those of Sicily

and Naples, commanded severally by Spaniards, Julien, Romero, and Alfonso de Ulloa--and considered the finest foot-soldiers in the world.

They marched with quick strides, their colours furled, their general riding before them; the stout figures of the Calabrese, the slender strength of the Sicilians, adorned with rich arms and silk scarves and plumes of brilliant colours, and the fierce, gay, dark faces, made a strange picture of force and energy hastening through the lonely night.

Behind them came two companies of women, some on foot, walking with perfect discipline and order, some riding on the baggage waggons or the sumpter-mules.

These were the camp-followers, but neither poor nor ragged; they were as well-appointed as any well-born lady, and many had a page or attendant; behind the wantons rode a small company of priests with a little escort of horsemen.

So the Southern regiments passed; the charcoal burner gazed after them like one struck out of his senses.

At a distance of half a league (for the spaces between the three divisions were being rapidly diminished as the army neared the goal) came the next contingent, consisting of the artillery, which jangled quickly away into the night with rattle of wheels, crack of whip, and shout of driver, and twelve hundred Spanish cavalry, at the head of which rode Don Ferdinando de Toledo, the Duke's son, and Prior of that Great Order of the Church Militant--the Knights of St. John--wearing the noble vesture of his stately office.

Behind him came the musketeers, all wearing inlaid and engraved armour, and each attended, as if he had been an officer, by a squire

who bore his musket that new weapon not seen before in any army.

These splendid soldiers carried themselves with a great pride, the moon glowed softly in their exquisite cuirasses, cuisses, greaves, and helmets, which were most carefully polished; these horsemen were the only Spaniards in the army.

After them rode two Italian generals and the engineers--a gorgeous group of officers in undress or jousting armour, and wearing caps adorned with jewels and heron's feathers.

Next came a carriage containing Spanish priests of high rank, then other of the Spanish horsemen, then the baggage mules and the women.

There were no less than four hundred of these on horseback--Spanish, Italian, and French beauties, lavishly dressed in silk and velvet, with flowing mantles and precious embroideries; some were veiled like modest women, while others rode with their rich locks hanging over their shoulders and their hard beautiful faces uncovered.

One or two were singing in rather a melancholy fashion, several sat wearily on their handsome saddles, but all, like their meaner sisters who went afoot, conducted themselves with order and decorum.

When they had passed, dazzling the eyes and bewildering the mind of the staring charcoal-burner, there was a short pause; then a company of light horse galloped up out of the night, and behind them, riding more slowly, came a single horseman.

He was about sixty years of age, tall, of a slight figure, but of an appearance of great energy and strength, controlled, however, by a considerable stiffness of deportment and an air of cold and repelling

pride.

He wore a half-suit of plain blue armour, and black mantle, boots, and doublet; his face was extremely narrow, his features hard, his complexion dry yet flushed, his eyes small and dark and expressing nothing but arrogance; a plain velvet cap concealed his hair, a long beard of black frosted with white descended to his waist.

With his long thin body, small head, narrow countenance, and bright eyes he had a certain likeness to a snake; not in one lineament was there the least trace of any soft or pleasant emotion or sentiment; he seemed a man of ice and iron, haughty, cruel, and avaricious.

Without glancing to right or left, carelessly guiding his superb white Arab horse with one hand while the other fingered the plain cross that hung on his breast, this solitary rider, the great and terrible Duke of Alva, passed on towards the Netherlands.

After him came others of his especial escort of light cavalry, then more priests and more women (so well-provided for soul and body did Philip's armies go forth to crush the unbeliever), then another pause, and finally the rearguard of Lombard and Sardinian regiments, commanded by Sancho de Lodrovo and Gonzalo de Braccamonte.

These veterans, less fine, perhaps, than the glittering ranks of Sicily and Naples, were, nevertheless, magnificent men handsomely armed:

By the time they passed, the moon was fading, and the dawn was creeping in pale streams of light through the forest.

The charcoal-burner crouched lower down among the foxgloves and crossed himself fearfully.

By the time the whole sky had changed from the soft violet of night to the pale azure of the dawn, the last of Alva's army had disappeared, and there remained on the road only the straggling followers--the peasants, who hoped to sell their produce, eagerly whipping along their mules; the poor who hoped for charity; the idle who hoped for stray plunder; boys who had marched miles from their homes in sheer aimless excitement.

The charcoal-burner, encouraged by the sight of his own kind, called out softly to one of the men with the mules--

"Who are they, those great and wonderful fellows who have just passed?"

The other answered with some pride in his knowledge--

"That is the mighty army of the King of Spain."

"May the angels all preserve us! And where are they going?"

"To the Netherlands to avenge the insolence of the heretics."

"And he in the midst?"

"That was the Duke of Alva. They all have money and pay well. If I can catch up with the camp to-night I shall have enough to pay me for my journey."

So he and his mules, laden with fruit and vegetables and skins of wine, disappeared into the misty depths of the forest.

The charcoal burner dragged his sleepy children out of the foxglove bed and returned to his hut where his wife, who was not interested in the passing army at all, was already putting the bread and milk on the table; and before they ate, the man made them all thank God that

they were not heretics in the Netherlands,

That day Alva crossed the frontier; that night he slept within the provinces. Scouts brought him news that Count Egmont was riding forth to Tirlemont to welcome him; he received the news with his usual cold stare.

Inside his plain doublet were many precious documents written by the hand of Philip; among them were the warrants for the deaths of Egmont, Hoorne, and the Prince of Orange.

PART III - The House Of Nassau

"Pro libertate Patriae agere aut pati fortiora."

--Legend on an Orange Medal.

I - DILLENBURG

Life in the ancestral castle of the German Nassaus at Dillenburg was very different from what the life in Brussels, Antwerp, or Breda had been.

The old Countess of Nassau, Juliana of Stollberg, was the head of this household, and with her lived Count John, his wife the Landgravine Elisabeth, and their family; here, too, resided the unmarried daughters of the house, Juliana, and Magdalena--lately betrothed to Wolfgang, Count of Hohenlohe; while the married daughters, Anna, the Countess of Nassau Saarbruck; and Elisabeth, Countess of Solms Braunfels; Catherine, Countess of Schwarzburg; and the Countess van der Berg were continually coming and going on visits to their old home.

There was not much money and no magnificence at Dillenburg when the eldest son, practically an exile and a fugitive, arrived with his sickly peevish wife and his train of a hundred and fifty--very shorn splendour for the Prince of Orange, but a considerable strain on the resources of Count John.

But the welcome was none the less passionately sincere in love and pride, and William was treated by his family with the same deference as if he had been still the favourite of Charles V, or the greatest man in the Netherlands.

His brothers, Adolphus and Henry--a youth who had just left College--returned eagerly to Dillenburg to join him, and Count Louis left Brederode, who was revolving one scheme after another that came to nothing, and hastened to Germany.

Meanwhile William waited for news from the Netherlands, for news of the proceedings of Alva, and for answers to the letters that he had sent to the German Protestant Princes--the Elector of Saxony and the Landgrave of Hesse.

Now at last he had begun to reap the fruit of that foresight which had induced him to engage in his second marriage despite the lively disapproval of Philip.

That marriage had been as disastrous as his worst enemies could have hoped, but at least it had given him some claim on the friendship of Anne's relations.

William had also asked the old Landgrave Philip to send him a Lutheran preacher, who was immediately and joyfully dispatched, and the Prince of Orange occupied the first leisure he had known for years in studying the New Testament and listening to the exposition of the tenets of Martin Luther.

But Alva, Philip's swift and sure right hand, had lost no time in striking him one blow that hit both his pride and his affections.

His eldest son, the Count of Buren, was beguiled by Alva from school in Louvain (where William had left him, relying on the high and ancient privileges of the University) and sent to Spain, where he had gone a willing captive, flattered and caressed, for he was a child and knew nothing of his father nor of Philip.

Thus the first move was to Alva, and the Prince, bitterly wounded and

outraged, had had to admit that his sagacity had been at fault; what foolishness to rely on any charters or privileges where Alva and Philip were concerned.

He took this grief silently and applied himself to long and careful preparations for the part he intended to take upon himself. He was hours closeted with Count John, hours with the Lutheran minister; his private table was covered with papers on which theological arguments were mingled with numerical calculations—estimates of the worth of his now available estates, estimates even of the value of his jewels and plate, rude maps of the Netherlands, lists of the towns with their several strengths, rough draughts of letters to the Emperor, to the King of France, to the Order of the Golden Fleece.

He was in correspondence with great persons in England and in close touch with the Huguenots of France.

In a few months after his departure from the Netherlands he had already in his hands the threads of a widespread league against Philip, which his industry, his high prestige, his astute statesmanship had accomplished single-handed.

Nor was he wantonly rushing into rebellion against the man to whom he had sworn loyalty.

Philip had in everything justified the suspicions of the Prince.

One of Alva's first acts had been to arrest Egmont and Hoorne, whom he had before caressed and flattered; Montigny and Berghen were prisoners in Spain. Alva had seized the keys of every city in the Netherlands. Margaret was the mere shadow of authority, and Alva was absolute.

He seemed to have but two objects—blood and gold: the blood of the

heretics, that was to smoke to heaven to please the nostrils of the Lord; and the gold of the heretics, which was to flow to Spain to please the eyes of the King.

In both ways were the Netherlands to be drained, of life and of treasure; and so Alva hoped to avenge the outrages which had been offered to both spiritual and temporal power.

The estates of the Prince of Orange had been threatened with confiscation, and he himself, together with Montigny, Culemburg, Van der Berg, and Hoogstraaten had been summoned to appear within fourteen days before the Council of Troubles, an arbitrary tribunal established by Alva which had already earned the title of the Council of Blood.

The Prince of Orange, therefore, was not organizing a rebellion against a pacific monarch who was prepared to leave him in peace if he remained in[^]exile; he but struck at one who was striking at him, his friends, his country, with blind, fanatical fury, a cunning treachery, a narrow cruelty that was almost inconceivable.

And in striking at William of Orange, Philip had roused more than was in his nature to believe in, as a man intent on killing little helpless animals may carelessly wound a sleeping lion, whose presence he had no wit to guess at.

So William, silently, made his preparations against Spain; so the tranquil autumn and the vintage passed, and the spring came gaily back to Dillenburg.

The Nassau women employed themselves in household tasks, eagerly talking together, eagerly helping the men whenever might be, fervently attending the plain Lutheran service in the plain Lutheran chapel, and listening reverently to the impassioned sermons of the

preacher.

These days were sweet to Rénée le Meung; she knew them as only a prelude to great trouble, perhaps great agony, yet for the moment she was happy.

The women treated her kindly, she felt one of a family, not part of the mechanism of a household; there was no need to keep such wearing watch on Anne, who was helpless for evil here. Every one she spoke to was of her own faith; there was no longer in her ears the scoffs and insults of Papists, no longer horrible tales of torture and death repeated on every side.

Here were peace and kindness and affection. And if Anne writhed under the confinement, the monotony, the simplicity, alternating between bitter melancholy and passionate fury, Rénée found the atmosphere as refreshing to her parched soul as water to dry lips.

And her greatest joy--her secret, almost holy joy--was in the attitude of the Prince; for in him she discerned now, beyond all doubt, the destined champion of her country and her faith.

It was in the early spring that Count Louis came to Dillenburg. He stopped one moment to receive his mother's warm salute, then went straight to the Prince.

William was in a room which was fitted up as a library, a small and modest chamber near the chapel.

The books on the simple shelves were mostly theological works collected by William's father, treatises and pamphlets in Latin and French, written when the first heat of fierce controversy had raged over the schism in the Church.

Before the pointed Gothic window was a desk of heavy black wood.

piled with papers and furnished with a large brass ink-pot and sand-dish and a tall silver hourglass.

In the centre was a large and worn Bible.

There was no furniture in the room beyond a few chairs covered with faded tapestry and the shelves of books; the April sun, fine and clear, filled every corner of the room and showed the dust on the books, on the floor, and in crevices of the shelves.

William rose instantly from his desk and embraced his brother, then led him to the deep window-seat, which was rilled with red cushions from which the sun had taken the brightness.

Neither of these young men, once so splendid, were any longer magnificent. William wore a suit of dark blue camlet with a ruff of plain needlework, and no jewels beyond a yellow topaz signet ring; Louis was habited in a brown riding suit and boots dusty to the knees: he had lately lost something of his bloom and freshness, and his brilliant eyes were tired and shadowed; but his firm-featured, beardless face, framed in the graceful blonde curls, retained the old ardent charm.

Round his neck hung a silver "beggar" medal and a tiny silver cup.

"Any news?" asked William, gazing at him affectionately and still retaining his hand.

"Some news, yes. At Cleves I met the Spanish post--Berghen is dead," replied Louis in a moved voice.

"Dead?" echoed the Prince. "So soon?" And his face saddened as he reflected that this was the first sacrifice from among the Netherland nobles who had dared to disobey Philip. "Dead?--and in

Spain!"

"In a Spanish prison," amended Louis. "They say he died of homesickness and disappointment. God knows! At least it is certain he is dead, and there seems little hope for Montigny. No one believes he will ever leave Spain. His poor wife is wearing out the altar stones with kneeling to her saints! May they comfort her!"

"Why would he go!" exclaimed William. "He was infatuate, as all of them. And Egmont?"

"There is no hope for Egmont; he and Hoorne are surely doomed," replied the Count sombrely. "The Countess Egmont and her children will be utterly ruined, for every thaler he possesses is held confiscate."

"And this is the reward of his loyalty," remarked William grimly. "To what end did he stoop to play the persecutor at Valenciennes! Yet he was always sanguine."

"Even after Alva came, and others had warned him, he would not believe. He had a sweet letter from the King, written after the Duke sailed and complimenting him on his loyalty--he put all faith in that."

"Ah, Philip!" cried William, with a deep accent of hatred.

"It was a trap," continued the Count--"a trap for all of us. Granvelle and Spinosa planned it with Alva."

"I know," said the Prince. "The design is to utterly subjugate the Provinces, execute all those who were against Granvelle, re-establish the Inquisition, exterminate all heretics, and make the Netherlands subject appendages of the Spanish Crown as are the Italian states--that is Philip's policy. Mine," he added, with a certain passion, "will be to prevent it."

"Surely you can, surely you will," said Louis, with enthusiasm and reverence.

"Yet do not think me sanguine," answered the Prince gravely. "I know what I undertake. I know the might of Spain. Egmont might have done something, but that chance is past. Oh, I am not sanguine! I think before this struggle is over Granvelle may count all his enemies among the dead. Berghen has gone--Montigny, Egmont, Hoorne are doomed nay, are we not all doomed?"

"Doomed?" repeated Louis quietly.

"By Philip. He has judged and condemned us, and his vengeance has many faces. If you go on, Louis, go on as I shall, as a man devoted to a cause almost hopeless--as one under sentence of death."

"It does not frighten me," answered the young Count simply. "I love the cause and I love the commander!"

He kissed his brother's hand.

"It is some time," he added, "since I entreated to be your lieutenant."

William smiled.

"Where is your 'beggars' league now, Louis? Drowned as it was born, in Brederode's wassail bowl! What did those men prove? Good fellows, but none of them of any worth save Culemburg and Ste Aldegonde."

Louis flushed.

"But I have some men gathered together," he said. "A poor little

army, it is true, but something."

"That is your work, not Brederode's," answered William.

"Poor Brederode!" exclaimed the Count generously. "He was brave and loyal, and now all his schemes have failed. I think he will die of it--I left him creeping to Germany, a disappointed man."

"Leave him; he is happier than some better men," said the Prince. "And to our affairs. I too have been enrolling an army--a poor thing too, refugees, mercenaries--but something."

The two brothers looked at each other with a keen and flashing glance.

"You will invade the Netherlands?" asked Louis eagerly.

"If I can get the money, I will," answered the Prince, and he spoke quite simply, as if it was not in the least a wonderful feat to even contemplate this marching against the finest army in the world with a handful of raw recruits and mercenaries.

"Ah, the money!" sighed Louis. He too was of an heroic temper, he too took the tremendous task simply; but he was daunted by the mention of what had completely checked his own gallant efforts.

"We need," said William, speaking with a precision which showed that he had well studied the subject, "at least two hundred thousand crowns. There was," he added, with a smile, "a time when I could have raised as much from my own estates--but not now!"

"It is not so much," remarked Louis hopefully.

"Half," continued William, leaning forward and taking some papers from under the great Bible, "I have already had promised me from

my agents in Antwerp, Amsterdam, Leyden, Haarlem, and other great towns; some has been promised by the refugee merchants in England."

"And for the rest?"

"Culemburg, Van der Berg, and Hoogstraaten will help--the House of Nassau must make up the balance."

Louis sat thoughtful, his eyes narrowed while he made a mental calculation.

"I could raise ten thousand," he said at length.

William added the sum to the list he held in his hand.

"John will help," he remarked. "And I, I will do what I can. Would we now had the money we once spent on pleasure--yet those were golden days, and I regret them not."

He rose and paced up and down the room, holding his papers.

"There are the Huguenots under De Villars they would do something. Then I think many would join us. Alva is so hated."

Louis remained in the window-seat, gazing out on the golden April day which was now fading to a close.

"I will do whatever you tell me," he said, with a submission that was almost childlike from one so brilliant in achievement.

A single bell sounded through the stillness of the castle.

"It is for the evening service," said William. "Will you go?"

Tired and dusty as he was, the Count assented.

"And you?" he asked.

William put his papers carefully away under the Bible.

"In my mother's house I may honour my mother's faith," he said.

The two young men went down to the chapel together.

II - JULIANA OF STOLBERG

A few days after the return of Count Louis to Dillenburg, a notable company was gathered in the large council chamber. It was long since it had served for councils, having for many a day been put to lighter uses—for ball, feast, and family celebration.

There was no magnificence save only the magnificence of the high Gothic arches, and no splendour save only the splendour of the windows gorgeous with the lion and billets of Nassau in blue and yellow and the twisted lettering of the motto of the house: "Ce sera Nassau, moi, je maintiendrai."

A plain oak table, no longer polished, and worn to a tint like dark silver, occupied the centre of the room; a circle of high-backed chairs covered with fringed leather and fastened with tarnished gilt nails surrounded the table: the one near the window was distinguished by arms shaped like twisted dragons, and there sat William of Orange, with a pile of letters and papers in his hand.

His dark face, his dark habit were in shadow against the glowing light of the coloured glass; his head was bent a little, and with his long brown fingers he absently fluttered over the pages of the documents he held.

On one side of him sat Count John and Count Louis; on the other, Count Adolphus and Count Henry; while beyond the five brothers were Count van der Berg, Count Hoogstraaten, Count Culemburg, the Seigneur de Villars, and the Seigneur de Cocqueville, the French Huguenots.

All these gentlemen were young in years and grave in deportment, being indeed weighted with matters of life and death. Two of the Nassau Counts, Adolphus and Henry, were little more than boys, the younger being but eighteen; his bright locks, his eager ardent look, the charm of his early morning years, made him a pleasant picture as he gazed intently at the Prince, to whom he bore so distinct and touching a likeness.

The details of the intended raid on the Netherlands were being discussed.

In a quiet voice William had read out the sums at their disposal.

Fifty thousand crowns from the great cities of the Netherlands and the refugees in England, fifty thousand crowns from the Prince himself, ten thousand from Louis, thirty thousand from Hoogstraaten, thirty thousand each from Gulemburg and Van der Berg, ten thousand by a secret messenger from the Dowager Countess Hoorne, the desperate mother of those two doomed men, Hoorne and Montigny, who lay, one in a Spanish, one in a Flemish prison, ignorant of each other's fate.

In addition to this, William placed on the table a list of all his jewels, furniture, plate, dogs, falcons, pictures, and precious apparel, such as robes trimmed with valuable furs, laces, and costly velvets embroidered with jewels.

Count John too announced that he had pledged his estates to raise

a large sum of ready money, and the Huguenot gentlemen offered both men and gold.

"We can give nothing but our swords," said Henry of Nassau, looking half vexed, half smiling at Adolphus, who added softly, "and our lives."

William heard the words; he glanced quickly at his two younger brothers, and slightly winced. From the first moment when he had resolved to undertake this tremendous struggle it had not been the treasure that he had thought of, but the noble lives that might be sacrificed. Before this dark venture on which he was engaging was over, the House of Nassau might be stripped of all its sons as leaves are stripped from a tree and blown uselessly down the wind; and as for those gathered round him now, how many might fall, even in the first shock of battle?

As for himself, he had staked everything he possessed; on the thick sheets of paper on the table before him stood named all his property. The sale of this would leave him a poor, nay, almost a beggared man.

Yet even with all these sacrifices the total sum raised was barely sufficient for one campaign, since they had to pay mercenaries and support them in a country already desolate and mastered by foreign troops.

"And it is Alva who is against us," said William; his eyes gleamed as he spoke the great captain's name, and his voice vibrated with excitement.

"And behind Alva all the treasure of Spain," added Culemburg, glancing at the list of their own poor resources.

"That," said the Prince quickly, "is not so tremendous--the treasure of Spain. It will take all the gold of America to govern the Netherlands as Alva means to govern them--to maintain an army in a country ruined, barren--the trade lost, the wealthy fled. Alva is a poor financier, and he will not obtain much aid from Philip, who looks to see gold pouring from the Netherlands--not into them. To exhaust Alva's resources is but a question of time."

"But we?" asked Louis. "Can we wait? If this first attempt fails, can we go on?"

"We can go on till we die," answered William. "There is nothing to stop us but the failure of ourselves. There are plenty of men and plenty of money in the world--many who hate Spain and who love the Reformed Faith. We do not venture in a little cause nor a foolish one."

Louis looked at his brother.

"For me, I shall not fail, save only by my death," he said.

"I do believe it," said William warmly, "and think the same true of all here present. Seigneurs, for yourselves you can answer--your cause, your faith, your country; for the House of Nassau I can speak." He glanced at his four brothers. "We shall not hesitate nor turn back nor lay down our arms until these Provinces of His Majesty be released from the desolation of the Spaniards and the abomination of the Inquisition, or till death free us from our task."

He did not speak vaingloriously or boastfully, nor with any arrogance or pride, but almost sadly; and on those present, who knew how long he had deliberated, how strenuously he had striven to bring the Government to reason and moderation, how loath he had been to take up arms against Philip, this solemn declaration of his

irrevocable decision had a weighty effect.

They knew that he dedicated himself, his brothers, and all the possessions of his famous house to this cause, not with the reckless enthusiasm of the adventurer nor with the hot-headed daring of one who had nothing to lose, but with the serene strength of one who had been regally great, who had owned everything the world can offer, and who had quietly laid down all rather than become an accomplice of senseless tyranny.

He waited for no comments on his words, but selecting a rough map of the Netherlands from the papers before him, laid it on the table, where the bright glow of the window flushed it gold, and indicated with his finger the routes to be taken by the attacking forces, which were to be divided into three, under Louis, De Villars, and De Cocqueville, while he himself was to wait at Cleves with a fourth contingent to follow up success or cover defeat.

"De Cocqueville by Artois with the Huguenots and refugees—two or three thousand men," said the Prince, glancing at the Frenchman, who smiled and nodded. "Hoogstraaten with De Villars, through Juliers on Maastricht; Louis on Friesland, on the west all should be in the field by May."

He leant back in his chair and folded up his papers.

"All these expeditions will be desperate adventures," he added abruptly. "You, gentlemen, will be taking raw troops and mercenaries against the finest veterans in the world—yet men have been victorious before with bad tools and a good cause."

"I do not think of failure," answered Louis, with that eager gaiety that showed so charmingly in him; for he was no ignorant stripling, but a brilliant, experienced soldier. William looked at him in silence; it was

in his mind that they must think of failure, and meet it, often.

But now was not the moment for doubt and discouragement, and the native cheerfulness of the Prince made it easy for him to assume a calm and hopeful front.

With a half-laugh he handed to Louis, Culemburg, and Van der Berg their several commissions for raising men and levying war against Philip and his men--"to prevent the desolation overhanging the country by the ferocity of the Spaniards, to maintain the privileges sworn to by His Majesty and his predecessors, to prevent the extirpation of all religion by the Edicts, and to save the sons and daughters of the land from abject slavery, we have requested our dearly loved brother, Louis of Nassau, to issue as many troops as he shall think needful." So, still preserving the fiction of loyalty, did William defy Philip in terms of courteous submission to His Majesty; so he, as sovereign Prince of Orange, owning no lord, exercised his right to levy troops and declare war.

He had already refused haughtily the jurisdiction of Alva's Council of Troubles and proclaimed that he was only answerable to his peers, the of the Knights of the Golden Fleece and to the Emperor; and now he put himself even more definitely on the side of Philip's enemies. His expression was almost amused as he gave the three Counts the formal copies of their commission; his quick mind looked forward and saw that spare, pale figure wandering round the half-built Escorial, and his rage when he learnt that the one grandee of the Netherlands who had escaped his far-flung net was likely to strike a blow that would revenge all the others.

The council broke up.

As the gentlemen left the apartment the Seigneur de Villars asked Count Louis, what news from the Provinces?

"The last news--a week old--is but the same story," replied Louis: "murder, massacre, confiscation. It is believed that the Duchess will retire to Parma, leaving Alva absolute master, as he is indeed now. Culemburg's palace on the horse market has been confiscated--"

"As a revenge for the conspiracy that was plotted there," added Hoogstraaten, with a smile "the Mass on Parma's wedding day, the banquet of the 'beggars'! Culemburg has paid dear for a sermon and a dinner."

"Brederode has paid dearer," said Culemburg.

"He is dead, is he not, your great 'beggar?'" asked De Cocqueville.

"At Castle Handeberg," answered the Nassau Count, a little sadly. "He fell into a melancholy, and drank himself to death; so his great shouting and fury ended in nothing--like a huge wind flowing aimlessly and suddenly dropping. Alas, he would have served us well now. I am sorry that his gaiety and his courage are overlaid with dust for ever."

"It is strange to think that Brederode is silent at last," remarked Van der Berg,--"he who talked and laughed so well."

The western light of evening filled the old, plain but pleasant castle as the Nassau Princes and their guests went down to the chapel, where the preacher had already entered for the evening service.

This chapel, once gorgeous with the beautiful pomp of the ancient faith, was now entirely bare of all ornament.

Plain glass filled the windows which had once glowed with regal colours; the ordinary light of day now entered and lit all the aisles and arches which had once been obscured with mysterious gloom; a

coat of whitewash obliterated the paintings on walls and pillars and ceiling; plain rows of benches took the place of carved *prie-Dieu* and tasselled cushions.

The pulpit was of simple wood, the seat of the Nassau family directly facing it; in each place a Bible and a Prayer Book with a broad green marker were laid.

Green curtains on brass rods screened off the upper portion of the arches, and green boughs waved against the clear windows; the white interior of the church was all coloured with this green reflection, which was extraordinarily cool, quiet, and peaceful.

When William and his companions entered the chapel it was already nearly full, most of the household being in their places.

In the Nassau pew sat the Countess of Nassau, Juliana of Stolberg, her three daughters--Magdalena, Juliana, and Catherine, the wife of Van der Berg.

Near them were their women. Anne had not come, being literally ill with rage at her husband's decision to sell his property; but Rénée le Meung was there. She glanced continually at the four Nassau women, so handsome, so modest, so fine with their simple attire and princely carriage; she saw that the Countess of Nassau was pale, and guessed the reason: of all who were sacrificing to the Protestant cause and the rescue of the Netherlands, no one was giving what this lady was--four splendid sons to war and peril, a fifth to possible ruin, all her own possessions, the husband of her favourite daughter--the wealth and security of her house, and all her kinsmen.

When William and his brothers entered and took their places in the pew before her, she lifted her eyes from her Bible and gazed at them with unspeakable yearning and unspeakable triumph.

This was an offering worthy to put before the Lord, these were men fit to be dedicated to His service: the noble, magnificent William, the pride of his name, and famous in Europe; the handsome Louis, gallant, pious, intelligent, and brave; the chivalrous Adolphus in his healthy young manhood; Henry, the graceful youth already promising all the splendours of his race; John, resolute, loyal, capable, who had laid down all he possessed at the service of his brother,—their mother's gaze travelled from one to the other of them as they sat before her, and her heart contracted and her lips trembled as she wondered when she would see them all together again as she wondered how many would return to her, how many would fall in the struggle on which they were now entering.

She did not complain, even in her inmost heart; the touch of sternness that was inevitable with a sincere belief in her austere creed strengthened her and enabled her to be glad and proud that they were all united in a cause she considered sacred.

She was prepared to let them all go, to lose them, if God willed, one after the other, and neither to murmur nor lament.

Yet how she cared, how she suffered in the midst of her pride and triumph, the pain that shook her as she watched them, so young, so brilliant, so pleasant, none present guessed save perhaps Rénée le Meung, whose senses were acute with love.

The Countess knew for what reason the council had been held to-day: she knew that in a while now all would scatter to try the desperate chances of a desperate war, and not by one word would she have striven to hold them back; but as the quiet service continued, as the green glow of the trees was changed to the westering flood of red over those five martial figures who had once been children on her knee, Juliana of Stolberg breathed a prayer for them that was a prayer of agony.

When the service was over, she lingered a little in the white chapel, now filling with the dusk; her limbs trembled and her eyes were misty. Her daughters stayed with her, all sad for their brothers, Catherine too for her husband.

Each woman thought of the long vista of anxious days before them--days of waiting, days of news perhaps worse than waiting; days when they would remember, with such poignant pain, this present tune of peace.

They slowly left the chapel, Rénée behind them, unnoticed in the shadow.

In the antechamber William waited for his mother.

Her dark eyes smiled at him, she put out her hand and touched his shoulder.

"When do you start?" she asked.

"In a week or so--we should be all in the field by May."

"All? So soon?" She said no more, and she still smiled.

But Rénée, the other woman who loved William, understood, with a dreadful sympathy, what was being endured by the Countess's brave heart.

III - HEILIGER LEE

By the end of April Louis of Nassau and his army of refugees, adventurers, and mercenaries had entered Friesland; at Appingadam he was joined by Adolphus in command of a troop of

horse, and the two brothers advanced on Groningen, which town refused to receive the rebels but gave them a sum of money on condition that they renounced an attack on the city.

With this much-needed treasure Louis was enabled to keep together his troops and enrol more of the fugitives who daily flocked to his banner, while he retained his headquarters at Appingadam, strengthening his forces and waiting for news of the enemy.

Early in May, Aremberg, Stadtholder of Friesland, came in sight of Louis's entrenchments; there was a sharp skirmish and Aremberg fell back on Wittewerum Abbey, where he encamped, waiting for the arrival of Count Meghem, Stadtholder of Guelders, who was coming up through Coeverden with reinforcements of infantry and light horse.

Louis was aware that Alva's two lieutenants were only waiting to join forces to attack him, even if Aremberg did not fall on him alone; he knew too that the troops coming against him were four thousand of Alva's best men, including Braccamonte's famous Sardinian regiments, and he was keenly conscious of the wretched rabble his own troops showed in consequence; they were mostly untrained, mostly in poor condition, and had only been kept from a mutiny by the money of the city of Groningen and Louis's acts and promises.

William's brother had started on this enterprise with a recklessness that was not impudence but heroism; he was a good general and a fine soldier, and well knew how desperate was his adventure with such materials, but he had not hesitated, for to wait for more money and better men would have been to wait for ever.

Learning that Meghem had not yet arrived at Aremberg's camp, he shifted his own position, marched three leagues through a little forest of fir trees, and entrenched himself near the monastery of Heiliger Lee.

There he was joined by a messenger disguised as a priest who brought him news from Maestricht.

It was completely disastrous; illness had prevented Hoogstraaten from taking his appointed command, and the Seigneur de Villars had led the forces which were to attack Juliers, raise the country, and secure Maestricht. These objects had failed. Two Spanish generals, De Lodrovo and D'Avila, had attacked and defeated him at Dalem; all the invading force of three thousand men had been put to the sword, and De Villars himself sent to Brussels for execution.

So ended one of the three attempts on the Netherlands. Louis crushed the dispatch (which had been sent by one of the Prince's secret agents in Maestricht) into his doublet, and said not a word of its contents to any, even to Adolphus. That evening they dined in the convent of Heiliger Lee from which the monks had fled at their approach; the abbot had joined Aremberg at Wittewerum.

The building was pleasantly situated on a slightly rising ground which behind sloped up to a wood of short poplars and beech; to the left was a large plain divided, for agricultural purposes, into squares by means of ditches or canals; before it and to the right was a vast stretch of swampy ground which, though covered with lush green grass, and in part transformed into pasture land, was, at this season of the year, impassable; a stone causeway leading to the convent crossed this deceitful morass, which was bordered by a road winding round the wood and hill—the road by which Aremberg must arrive if he made an attack.

Louis' position was as good as was possible to find in a country so dangerous by reason of ditches and swamps, the shoulder of the hill protected some of the troops, and the remainder occupied the only piece of dry ground in the vicinity; the morass stretched before their

encampment as a natural defence; the heights, too, of Heiliger Lee (artificially created by early monks) were the only rising portions of ground in the whole flat district which was girdled and swamped by the overflowing waters of the Em and the Lippe. The ground was historic; as the two brothers wandered in the convent gardens before the dinner hour, they reminded each other of their school learning, when they had read of Hermann, that early Goth who, on the very swamp at which they now gazed, had turned back the victorious legions of Rome.

And now again the Germanic people were gathered to resist Latin tyranny and to oppose proud assumption of universal dominion by the assertion of man's eternal right to freedom of person and of conscience.

It was a fair evening, and the scene before the two young generals was beautiful with the languid, mellow, golden beauty of the Low Countries. The swamps, covered with grass of a most brilliant green hue, melted to a wistful horizon straight as the line of the sea and misted with gold which faded into the soft azure of the heavens; the woods were of the same hues, a sharp, bright, delicate green and gold, dull and glowing like the tint of honey.

The road and the stone causeway were warm with the dusky golden shadow of evening; the convent buildings also were warm and mellow in tone; the low-walled gardens before the doors were filled with homely flowers pinks, stocks, and wallflowers.

Louis leant his elbows on the wall and looked across the low sweet prospect. His eye travelled to the plain where his ill-equipped forces were encamped; he watched the men moving about among the tents preparing their food, and thought of those four thousand beaten out of existence at Dalem, and of the Seigneur de Villars waiting to be sent to the scaffold.

Louis remembered him in that last Council at Dillenburg, how he had asked about Brederode, and lamented for his death--he whose own days were so numbered!

The Nassau Count's face hardened; who would next pay toll to the Spanish fury?

Adolphus spoke, scattering his brother's thoughts.

"If they try to cross the swamp, we have them," he said keenly, surveying the verdant treacherous ground.

"Aremberg is Stadtholder here, he must know the country," replied Louis; "if it were a Spanish commander I should have different and better hopes."

"I have good hopes," said Adolphus. He was to-night a little quieter, graver than usual; his fair and youthful face wore an expression of serenity and resolution Louis had not seen there before, but he had never been with his brother on the eve of battle.

Louis was glad he had not spoken of the news from Juliers.

"Aremberg will have good hopes too," he answered lightly. "He despises us and the 'beggars' bitterly enough. Strange how in the old days at Brussels we rode and ate together--we and Meghem, and now come to this!"

"Aremberg is a sick man," said Adolphus. "They say he can hardly sit his horse. I would rather die young than grow to be sick."

A white pigeon and a white butterfly took flight together from the convent wall and flew side by side across the swamp until they were lost in the melting mists of the distance.

Adolphus pointed to them.

"Like two souls departing," he said, putting back the thick lock of hair the evening breeze blew across his eyes. "Do you remember the skryer who foretold our fortunes at Leipsic?" he added.

"Yes," said Louis, with a little smile.

"He is in the camp. He followed us from Groningen, and asked me leave to join us. He was with Brederode, he said, even to his death, then wandered in our track from Germany. Do you think he can really read portents in the stars?"

The young Protestant general answered slowly--

"It does not seem to me that God would permit His heavens to show forth signs for mummers to profit by; yet these fellows have a grain of truth in their predictions--though maybe of the Devil; did not this man say in Leipsic we should all die a bloody death? And who among us then thought of war?"

"He told me yesterday," said Adolphus, "that for three nights there had been a falling star above Groningen, and that Aremberg's hours were counted."

"God's will be done," said Louis soberly; he gave another glance at his camp and then they turned into the convent where their simple meal was ready.

They were about to rise from the table when an officer brought into their presence a young peasant, a tall blond Frieslander, who told them that he had been running all day before Aremberg's army to warn them of the enemy's approach.

"The Stadtholder is coming straight on you," he said simply. "He has with him many foreign soldiers and the six cannon of Groningen."

"We," said Louis, "shall be ready to meet him."

Rising, he looked into the eyes, so blue and placid, of the young giant who had given him this valuable warning.

"Can you handle a matchlock or hold a pike?" he asked.

"Either, in the service of Your Excellency," answered the man quickly. "Anything to give a blow to the Spaniards. I have strong hands," and he held them out.

Louis smiled, to check a sigh.

"We are none of us great soldiers," he said, "but we may be great fighters if God wills."

He took the silver "beggar medal" from his neck and gave it to the Frieslander, bidding the officer who had brought him to enroll him in some company which was not full strength.

The young general and his brother then threw their mantles about them and, descending the hill, went on foot among the encampment, exhorting and encouraging the men (who now were enthusiastic enough), and disposing the troops.

The motley army was arranged in two battalions on the plain where they had encamped, each squadron flanked by musketeers and one protected by the base of the hill on the brow of which was placed some light-armed troops, at once the decoy and the shield of the main army.

The most dangerous position was assigned to the cavalry; this,

under the command of Adolphus, was in the vanguard of all, directly facing the wood-bordered road along which the Spaniards would approach.

When all arrangements were complete and all the officers had received their instructions at the hastily called field council, the brothers returned up the hill.

The stars were now beginning to fade in the light of a pallid dawn, the woods were hushed, the fields serene; the bodies of men moving about to take up their positions were indistinct black masses in the obscurity.

Louis felt his blood beat strongly; he was about to strike the first blow in the cause to which his House was now pledged; tremendous results, moral and material, hung on the issue of to-morrow's battle, and there was almost everything against him.

When he went to change into his complete armour he fell on his knees on the bare floor of the convent room and prayed--

"God, as we fight not for our own profit nor glory but for thy poor people, forgive us all our loves and our hates, our lusts and all our mistreadings, and let those who fall tomorrow die in thy mercy."

When he had armed he dismissed his pages and went down to where Adolphus already waited in the convent garden.

The young Count wore a suit of black mail with a little scarlet plume like a burst of flame in his casque, and across his heart a scarf of that orange colour, so bright and deep, that it was frequently mistaken for the scarlet sash of the Spanish officers.

Louis' harness was of uncoloured steel; he too wore the orange scarf, the tasselled ends of which fell to his thigh.

Among the fragrant flower-beds two grooms held the two black horses of the brothers.

The light had now strengthened so that they could distinguish the pikemen from the musketeers on the plain below, and discern the sutlers hastening to the rear with the baggage wagons.

Adolphus glanced at the banners which were being displayed in the still air, all of them glittering with gold and silk which traced, he knew, patriotic and bold inscriptions; then he watched with interest his own banner being brought up the hill by a galloping horseman.

Louis was straining his eyes down the darkling road where Aremberg was almost due.

"He will wait for Meghem, who cannot be a day's march behind," he said anxiously; "when he sees how we are entrenched he will skirmish and wait."

"God be entreated," said Adolphus, "that he attacks us."

They mounted, and were scarcely in the saddle before news came from the outposts that Aremberg was in sight.

The banner of Adolphus now waved at the head of his little troop of horsemen (not more than three hundred) who waited on the hill to take up their position.

Adolphus still looked at this banner; the morning breeze caught the folds and blew them out, showing the arms of Nassau with the mark of cadency of the fourth son and the words, "*Je Maintiendrai*," together with the inscription which was the motto of Louis' army, "*Nunc aut nunquam, recuperare aut mori*."

The brothers now, by a common instinct, turned to each other and clasped hands.

The two fine young faces, so alike in feature and expression in the stern frame of the open casque, gazed at each other with a wistful and silent affection.

Their hands loosened and they moved away, when suddenly Adolphus turned back, and, dropping the reins, threw his right arm round Louis' neck with a womanly gesture and kissed him; then at a gallop he swept away, put himself at the head of his little troop, and led them down the hill to their desperate and perilous position.

IV - THE FIRST BATTLE

Aremberg and his men came in sight of the "beggars," opened fire on the light troops on the hill from the Groningen cannon, then paused.

Louis of Nassau, waiting at the head of the main body of his army, felt his heart sink.

He discerned that the Stadtholder had noticed that to carry the rebels' position he must needs cross the swamp, and that he preferred to skirmish and wait for Meghem with reinforcements.

An hour of the bright morning passed heavily by; then, to the intense relief of Louis, Aremberg again opened fire.

The impatient Spanish officers had reproached the Netherlander for his slowness and caution; they had no wish to share glory and spoils with Meghem's men; they believed that the "beggars" would fly at sight of them; they even taunted Aremberg. Braccamonte, the general of the Sardinian troops, dared to suggest that the

Stadtholder, like his rebellious countrymen, was at heart a heretic.

Aremberg, broken by illness, stung and inflamed by the Southern insolence, gave orders for an immediate attack--orders that were against his own knowledge and experience and against the trend of all Alva's advice.

So the guns of the city of Groningen again opened fire, and their sound was music in the ears of the rebel commander, and the acrid smell of the powder, sweeter than the fresh perfume of the flowers opening to the early morning in the convent garden.

The light force which had received the fire now fled from their position.

Louis smiled, keenly watching the enemy.

Again there was a pause in the royal ranks; again Aremberg suggested a stratagem and the dangerous nature of the ground.

But the Spanish officers were now beyond control.

Seeing the flight of the troops on the hillside (a flight that was, as Aremberg suspected, a snare), they believed the whole rabble of the "beggars" were in a rout before them, and rushed forward to attack and disperse the two squadrons of the main army.

As they dashed from the road and the wood, brandishing their swords and shouting to each other, man after man plunged into the morass, the treacherous grass gave way beneath them, while the deep pools left by the peat gatherers sucked in others to their necks.

In a few moments the entire advance guard of the Spaniards was entangled, helpless, and perishing in the swamp.

Louis now ordered up his musketeers, who opened a quick fire on the struggling enemy and drove them back again into the marsh.

Meanwhile, Braccamonte was bringing up his rearguard to the rescue. Louis, perceiving this, sent his concealed battalions round the base of the hill to cut off the Spanish.

Braccamonte, finding himself ambushed, and fresh contingents of the Netherlands pouring in on his ranks, utterly lost his courage.

Shouting confused orders to his troop he turned and fled.

His men, surprised, left without a leader, were instantly driven back by the "beggars" and fell in helter-skelter confusion on to those already entrapped in the morass.

The battle field was now one red carnage; the verdant fields of grass were broken into trampled slime that disfigured the gay armour of the dead and dying Sardinian soldiers, whose dark faces were twisted into an expression of wrath and amazement.

The stagnant peat pools glowed horrid with blood, the once pure air smelt foul with smoke, the soft sounds of bird and insect were changed for broken curses, shouts of despair, and gasped prayers.

The proud, insolent, and arrogant troops of Spain knew themselves completely scattered and beaten by the rebels at whom they had so jeered and laughed.

Louis, gathering together the remainder of his men, dashed forward with weapons and banners uplifted, and fell upon the bewildered fugitives.

Aremberg had watched the troops, who had refused to listen to his orders, go to their steady defeat; when Braccamonte, riding hard for

safety, dashed past him, a bitter smile curled his pale lip.

"Save yourself!" shouted the Spaniard.

But the Netherlander, at whose courage the Southerners had mocked, never left his post.

He saw perfectly that the day was lost; his men were being cut to pieces before his eyes, his officers had fled; under his own command he had only a few horsemen.

Turning his gaze from the bloody mêlée where Louis was driving before him the boasted Sardinian regiments, Aremberg looked to the road, which was barred by Adolphus and his horsemen who still presented unbroken ranks though they had received the first shock of the artillery.

The few officers left in attendance on the Stadtholder urged his immediate flight along the road he had just traversed.

"How shall I account for this day's work to Alva?" answered the Netherlander sternly.

Rising in his stirrups he called to his men to follow him, and hurled himself on the young Nassau.

The two leaders singled each other out; they had last met in the tennis court at the Nassau palace in Brussels.

They smiled at each other, and both fired; Aremberg received the ball in his side, but fired again, then struck with his sword at the flame-like plume on the black casque.

It dipped and fell backwards; at the same moment a rush of "beggar" cavalry drove the Stadtholder before them.

He looked round, and perceived that all his men had fled save a few attendants; he had been shot twice through the side, his disease bowed him to the saddle with pain, the weight of his armour was almost intolerable; he cast away his helmet whose protection he despised, and retreated slowly, keeping his face to the enemy.

A musket ball struck his horse, which fell under him; two attendants picked him up and dragged the animal to its feet.

It staggered a few paces, then fell dead.

A second time Aremberg got to his feet; two rebel troopers approached him, he shot both, and continued to limp along the stone causeway on which the fresh blood was drying in the May sun.

He saw a large body of the enemy coming passionately behind him, and dragged himself painfully off the road on to a little meadow that sloped to the wood.

There he stood at bay leaning his back against a little fir tree that could hardly support his weight, and wiping, with the ragged ends of his sash, the cold sweat from his brow and the blood from his sword.

The enemy soon discovered him--there was half a regiment of them--he gathered all his strength to straighten his body that he might meet them standing.

Another shot struck him, he fell on his knees, still wielding his sword one against many; one officer cried out to spare him, for it was the Stadtholder, but even as he spoke Aremberg fell, shot through the throat, sinking on his own sword which broke and fell beneath him.

They picked him up and wrapped him in a cloak, and carried him through the morass filled with his dead soldiers to the victorious

Louis of Nassau.

That young general was flushed with hope; he had seen the veteran troops of Spain go down before the onslaught of the "beggars" and the Nassau arms wave above the field of victory.

The sun was only just beginning to slant in the heavens, and there was not one of all the boastful hosts of that morning to fire a shot or raise a sword for Spain.

When the dead general was laid at his feet, Louis uncovered.

"He should have been spared," he said, in a moved voice.

They lifted up the mantle and Louis looked down at the fiery Stadtholder now mangled with shot and sword.

"He was too good to be Alva's pawn," he said. "Such bravery went ill with such a cause."

He ordered the body to be carried up to the convent, and sent a messenger to his brother; he was himself turning up the hill when the clear challenge of advancing trumpets came across the wood.

"Meghem!" cried Louis, and hastened back to the head of his troop.

It was in truth the Stadtholder of Gueldres; Louis hastily called off the pursuers and, in the fear of another attack, drew back his entire force on to the dry ground.

But Count Meghem was alone; his troops had been too exhausted to push on; he, however, with a small bodyguard, had hurried from Zaidlaren where he had found a letter from Aremberg bidding him hasten.

Before he reached the encampment of the "beggars" the stream of fugitives told him of disaster; from some flying Sardinians he learnt of Aremberg's utter defeat and death.

Wild with fury he pushed recklessly on, until he was able to discern with his own eyes the distant swamp where had been engulfed the veterans of Spain, then turning his horse's head he pressed back to Zaidlaren and ordered his men to fall back and secure Groningen, in which city he sat down to write the news to Alva.

Louis, secure that there would be no further attack, now occupied himself in seeing to the troops and ordering the disposition of the wounded, who were not numerous, though more than a thousand of the enemy had been slain.

It was the hour of sunset when he returned to the convent; he expected there to find his brother, for whom he had repeatedly asked, but whom he had not seen since the battle.

He believed that Adolphus must have gone in pursuit of Braccamonte's flying battalions. With a sigh of fatigue he took off his casque and gloves and called for water and for his page to unbuckle his armour.

"Where is the Count Adolphus?" he asked again, looking round him.

The officers who filled the chamber were silent; then one of them drew Louis to the door of an inner room which had been a monk's cell.

This little apartment was flooded with light which poured through the dancing green branches of the fruit trees without and was musical with the evening song of birds.

The only furniture was a chair, a table, and a bed.

On the chair was a splendid stained sword, on the table a black casque with a flame-like plume, and on the bed something wrapped in the banner with the Nassau device which had waved that morning at the head of Adolphus' little troop of horse.

Louis could read quite plainly the words, "*Nunc aut nunquam, recuperare aut mori*," they were slightly sprinkled with blood.

And at the bottom of the bed the banner lifted, showing the soles of two mailed feet.

For a moment Louis felt his courage and strength leave him; he leant against the door-lintel as weak as a sick girl.

Then, "He is dead," he said; "why was I not told?" and with a firm step he approached the bed, and turned back the silk fold of the banner.

The young man lay with his head turned towards the wall. Aremberg's sword, cutting through steel and leather, had cloven the fair curls and the youthful forehead an inch deep; the reverently placed linen bandage was crimson with blood, and the long locks were clotted and tangled; the lips were strained into what seemed a stern smile, and the head had fallen so that the chin was raised haughtily. The orange scarf was pierced by a bullet that had entered under the edge of the cuirass, above this wound the young warrior's fine hands had been crossed.

Louis gazed long and earnestly, recalling every word of the youth's speech last night, every gesture, recalling his last embrace that morning--and the victory, bought with this dear blood, became as nothing to Louis of Nassau.

The first toll had been paid; very early in the fight had it been exacted; with the first crossing of swords a Nassau had laid down his life.

Louis bowed his head as he replaced the banner fold over the dead features, and his eyes swelled and burnt with tears.

Two of Adolphus' officers came softly forward now, gathering courage to speak.

"It was the Stadtholder slew His Excellency they came together through all their troop--the Count fell, very valiantly wounded, at the first onslaught--his two esquires were shot by Count Aremberg also."

"We brought him here," added the other, "not to disturb your lordship with grief until the fight was over."

Louis did not answer; he stood heavily, looking at the straight outline beneath the banner and thinking of the gallant figure who had kissed him that morning before the battle, and of the Prince at Cleves and the women at Dillenburg waiting for news, to whom would come this news--this and the news from Juliers which Adolphus had never known.

Barren and small seemed his victory to Louis, and heavy and mysterious the ways of God.

He left the little chamber, closing the door gently as if he feared to disturb his brother's solemn sleep, and went out into the still garden, now flushed rosy from the setting sun.

There against the wall leant a miserable figure, Duprès the skryer.

He glanced furtively and fearfully at Louis, yet with a pleading look like a dog waiting to be called.

Louis started at sight of him.

"Ah, you!" he exclaimed; "one of your prophecies has been fulfilled!"

Duprès abased himself before the young general.

"I knew," he said humbly. "But, seigneur, I never told him--I saw one star fall for Count Aremborg and one for *him*--but *he* knew without my words."

"Yes, I think he knew," replied Louis; he looked keenly at the half-starved, ragged figure of the refugee. "And when shall I join him, wise fellow?"

Duprès crouched away.

"The contest will outlast all the warriors," he muttered, "and your horoscope is more dreadful than his but how do I know? I cannot read the heavens as I could!"

"There is no need to look in the heavens for my portents," said Louis, as if speaking to himself, "they are blazed abroad before the eyes of men very clearly."

The golden dusk faded and darkness closed over Heiliger Lee, soft clouds passed over the setting sun which pierced them with level rays like spears; the dead men in the morass were hidden, the moving light of lanterns crossed and recrossed the victorious camp.

A mist, white and trembling, rose from the swamp and obscured the roadway; the young trees in the forest, shivered and faded to a dark hue against the last pearly glow of the west.

The birds were silent in the fruit garden, and all the flowers were

closed away and hidden in the night.

Count Aremberg lay lonely with a crucifix on his breast and his cloak folded straight; but throughout the night Louis kept company with his brother, kneeling on the boards beside his bed and wetting the blood-stained banner with his tears, while the heads of the two young warriors, still so alike, rested for the last time on the same pillow, touched, for the last time, cheek to cheek and lip to lip.

V - News From The Netherlands

The news of the dear-bought victory of Heiliger Lee was late in coming to Dillenburg; it was soon followed by the tale of the complete rout and loss of the third party of the invaders, who had invaded Artois under the Seigneur de Cocqueville. He and his entire force had been cut down at St. Valéry, and the survivors of the defeat had been instantly hanged.

From Brussels, too, came other news, as disastrous as sad. Alva's wrath had found a swift vent; the impudence of the "master beggars," as Meghem had called them, who had dared to defeat Alva's veteran troops and slay his general, was cruelly revenged on those in Alva's power who were suspected of sympathy with the rebels.

The members of the House of Nassau and their adherents were banished on pain of death, and their property confiscated.

On the ruins of the Culemburg Palace, which he had burnt to the ground, was erected a pillar commemorating the hatching and overthrow of the "beggar" conspiracy which had begun at the famous banquet held between their walls; and before this desolated spot, eighteen nobles and gentlemen were publicly executed, their heads and bodies afterwards being fastened to stakes and left to moulder

on the horse market.

And a few days later Egmont and Hoorne were brought to Brussels, and Alva filled in the blank death-warrants signed by Philip and brought from Spain, with the names of two of the most illustrious men in the Netherlands and the most obstinately loyal to Spain of all those Netherland nobles who had hated Granvelle and served Philip.

And on the sixth day of June the most awful blow yet struck at the Netherlands fell, and Lamoral Egmont, Prince of Graven, Stadtholder of Flanders, victor of St. Quentin and Gravelines, and Philip Montmorency, Count Hoome and High Admiral, both councillors of the Netherlands and Knights of the Golden Fleece, were publicly executed in the great square at Brussels.

The whole country shuddered to the heart, and the hatred of Alva grew to a passion and a fury.

There came other news to Dillenburg, to agonize Count John and the waiting-women there--news of more obscure victims. A lady and her servant who two years before had struck an image of the Virgin with a slipper were drowned by the hangman in a hogshead on the scaffold; a Lutheran who had died in prison was dragged to the place of execution and beheaded with his companions; people were arrested by the tens, the fifties, the hundreds, and put to death without trial.

Flight was no longer possible, as the ports were closed against heretics; trade was at a standstill, commerce at an end; all industries were destroyed, agriculture ruined; the rich properties had been all confiscated or plundered by Noircarnes, Meghem, and their followers.

The great nobles had perished or were in exile, and the nation lay

stunned and bleeding before her slaughterers.

In every town, in every village, new scaffolds were built, new fires lit; in every field and orchard the festering bodies hung; on every high road wandered destitute, half-crazed survivors, homeless and bereaved.

The death-bell was now the only music in a land once given to merriment, and the only dancing that of the dead swinging and shaking in their chains on gibbets, stakes, and trees; the great squares of the great cities, once worn smooth by the passing of thousands of busy feet, were now covered with rank grass and weeds, which were only disturbed by the tramp of the soldiery or the feeble steps of some half-starving wretches creeping into hiding.

Only the churches remained wealthy amid the poverty, only the priests and the Spaniards remained gorged and fat among the miserable and ruined; for while Netherland blood watered Netherland earth, Netherland gold streamed into Spanish pockets.

So had the Duke of Alva redeemed his boast that he would "tame these men of butter." So with the sword, the fire, the rope, the axe, he strove to uproot and destroy the seed Martin Luther had planted too deep for any man's uprooting and destroying.

The messenger who brought the news of the Artois disaster to Count John, and also dispatches from William, who was holding his position as well as was possible, was Francis Junius, the young minister who had preached in the now destroyed Culemburg palace on Parma's wedding day.

This man, who was absolutely without fear (on one occasion he had preached in a room lit by the flames of fellow-heretics perishing at the stake without), had been in Brussels, and had actually mingled

with the crowd that had been a horrified witness of the death of Hoorne and Egmont.

Then, after wandering through the desolate country and administering such comfort as he was able to the persecuted people, he had joined William at Cleves and, by him, been sent to Dillenburg.

When Junius had left Count John, Juliana of Stolberg sent for him.

He found her in a quiet room of the castle with her three daughters, Anne of Saxony, the Countess of Hoogstraaten, and several of her women.

The chamber was hung with worsted tapestry in sombre and faded hues; against this background the group of women, all in the dull black of mourning, with black caps on their fair hair and white ruffs surrounding their fair faces, made a startling picture. She in the deepest mourning of all was Hoogstraaten's wife; her dress was dull, without a touch even of white, for the Countess Hoogstraaten was the sister of Count Hoorne. She was seated next the Countess van der Berg, and the two were embroidering a child's dress with white and black thread.

The Princess of Orange, pale and haggard in the bitter black robes, played with a little white dog that lay on her knee; Rénée, also in mourning, sat on a low stool beside her mistress.

Francis Junius was also in a plain black gown a little worn and rusty, and a linen band without lace.

He was not discomposed by the presence of all these great ladies, but saluted them with the civil calm that was his habitual manner.

The Countess of Nassau rose and received him with a sweet

courtesy.

"You come from my son," she said, as she set him a chair with her own hands, "from the Prince of Orange? If you are not fatigued, I would hear some news of him."

The slim young minister sat gravely facing the semicircle of ladies; his worn and hollow face bore traces of disease and anxiety, but was animated with ardour and enthusiasm.

"The Prince is very well, gracious Madame, and bore most valiantly the grievous news. He is engaged in raising fresh levies for another attempt on the Netherlands. He sends these letters to your princely self and to Her Highness his wife."

With movements as precise as his words he delivered the letters to the ladies. The Countess slipped hers into the bosom of her dress; the Princess's letter remained on her lap, on the back of the little dog.

Francis Junius kept a reserved silence, as if waiting his dismissal, while the young women whose husbands and brothers were fighting in the cause he preached gazed at him with wide eyes of sympathy and awe.

But Juliana of Stolberg wished to hear more of that country where now all her interests were so passionately centred.

"Tell us," she said, with a sad, gentle earnestness, "of the Netherlands."

The preacher flushed and started from his abstraction.

"Of the Netherlands?" he repeated. "Alas, I have seen nothing in the Netherlands you or any lady would care to hear."

"Do you think we are so weak-hearted?" smiled the Countess, pointing to the mourning of all. "What we have endured and what we must endure, our thoughts and our anxieties, serve to steel us."

Her lips trembled and she put out her hand to clasp the sympathetic hand of her daughter Catherine, which crept on to her knee.

"Did you see my son Adolphus before he died?" she asked in a firmer voice.

"No, Madame--but I have heard of the great honour he had in his death. And I heard that the Count Louis was doing very wonderfully and resolutely with his little means."

"He had always a high, hopeful heart," replied the Countess, "and a very gallant way of cheerfulness. God grant that it be not overthrown nor dimmed."

"The House of Nassau," said the preacher, "is greatly blessed by all the poor people of these unhappy provinces--in that noble name alone," he added, with reverence, "they place their hopes."

"My sons can do much, not everything," answered Juliana of Stolberg. "The people too are valiant and patient, and fearful of God--give credit to the people and to such men as yourself, sir."

"I?" he exclaimed, in genuine astonishment. "I am as helpless before Alva as a straw before the wind!"

Hoogstraaten's wife spoke; her voice was grave, in tone like that of the Admiral, her brother.

"But you have been in great peril, there is a price on your head, and yet you stayed?"

"Ah, that, yes," he admitted simply, as if these things were a matter of course.

"Why did you stay?" asked Catherine van der Berg earnestly.

"It was the land where I was sent to labour, Madame, and perhaps I have been some use--to comfort one on his way to martyrdom, to console the bereaved, to utter a prayer over an unconsecrated grave, to encourage the soldiers of Prince William."

His expression became sad and thoughtful, and he bent his head as if it was heavy.

"It is all one can do," he added wistfully.

"It is enough," said Juliana of Stolberg. "God has guided your steps that you have come safely through such dangers."

Junius did not reply; he knew that he was doomed sooner or later to the torture and the stake, for he did not falter from his determination to continue his simple and heroic ministrations in the Netherlands.

"You saw the executions in Brussels?" asked Lenore Hoogstraaten in a low tone. "You saw Count Egmont die? And the Admiral?"

"Yes," replied the minister. "He died bravely in his mistaken faith and his mistaken loyalty."

Countess van der Berg had known the brilliant Egmont in the old glorious days, and she asked with a fearful curiosity after the last moments of that unfortunate grandee, looking tearfully the while at Hoorne's sad sister.

Junius answered in a low voice, quietly giving his impressions of that

last scene as he had witnessed it from the crowd. He was not greatly moved by what he recited; his fiery, single-minded piety had never had anything but contempt for such as Egmont, and he had seen more horrible things by far than the death of that nobleman.

"He came walking very composedly. The scaffold was covered with black cloth, with two black velvet cushions. There were Spanish soldiers round, three thousand of them. I think there were great fears of a rescue. It was hot weather, and the Count came about midday, when the sun was strong; he had asked, I heard, that he might die first. I was close enough to see him quite clearly. His hair was almost white, and he looked very tall; he wore a crimson velvet robe with a black velvet cape, and underneath one could see the badge of the Golden Fleece and his doublet cut away about the neck--by his own hand, I think.

"He made no speech, but walked up and down twisting a handkerchief in his hand. He seemed very passionate, and showed rage and despair, asking, I believe, to the very last if there was not to be a pardon.

"He disarranged himself and took off the badge of the Fleece, kissed the crucifix the Bishop of Yprès gave him, and knelt.

"The Spanish captain gave a signal, and I saw the executioner spring out from under the scaffold cloth, and it was over very swiftly."

The women remained pale and silent, only Hoogstraaten's wife asked, "And Hoorne--my brother?"

"The Admiral was more unmoved. He was all in black, and conducted himself without passion save when he saw his escutcheon hanging reversed on the scaffold, when he protested hotly. He looked on the body of Egmont, then wished the crowd

happiness, and begged them to pray for his soul--which I, for one, have done," added Junius simply. "He was not wept for like Count Egmont, but I think he was the better man."

"He lived, and died, gloomily," said the Countess Hoogstraaten. "He had no joy in wife or child. I wish I had been with him at the end."

"Even in his coffin he was lonely," answered Junius. "He lay in Ste Gudule, and no one went near him; but when Egmont was in St. Clara you could not move for the crowd weeping and praying. Yet, Madame," he turned to Hoorne's sister, "the Admiral will always have the greater honour before God."

"And the Countess Egmont?" asked Juliana of Stolberg.

"She and her children were in the utmost poverty, for every thaler he possessed was confiscate. The day of the execution they were supperless, and fled to a convent. Alva, it was said," smiled the preacher, "recommended them to Philip's charity."

The Nassau ladies exchanged commiserating glances, but Anne looked coldly; the Countess of Egmont had always been an object of her dislike and envy.

"It is a good lesson to one who was ever over-proud," she remarked.

These harsh words, the first that she had uttered since Junius entered her presence, caused the preacher to look at her with a stern surprise.

"You think I am uncharitable?" commented Anne boldly, returning his gaze with all her bitter, rebellious discontent unveiled in her heavy eyes. "But I am one who has lost as much as Countess Egmont in this miserable 'beggar' war."

The Countess of Nassau gave her a look of austere reproach.

"Are you not ashamed to speak so, you who have a husband, a home, and friends, while she is an outcast exile? Are you not ashamed to speak so before the sister of Hoorne and Montigny?"

"My husband! My home! My friends!" muttered Anne, and she bent over the little dog, clutching it till it yelped, and William's letter fell to the ground.

Rénée picked it up, the blood receding from her face as she touched the inscription he had written, the wax and cord he had sealed, and her mind pictured him in the midst of his pitiful little army, harassed with a thousand cares, penning this letter to an unworthy woman.

Juliana of Stolberg turned again to the young preacher.

"You will stay with us a while at Dillenburg," she said, "and, after all your labours, rest?"

He smiled at the idea that rest was any part of his life.

"Indeed I must return to the Netherlands," he answered. "I shall go back to meet the Prince at Strasburg, and afterwards to the Provinces."

"It is to step into hell's mouth," said the Prince's mother, "but it is so noble a resolve that I am ashamed to endeavour to dissuade you."

They talked a little longer about his work among the persecuted Netherlands, and then he left them to prepare himself for the service he was to take that evening in the chapel.

When he had left a silence fell over the little group of black-clad women; only Anne, who was like a firebrand of discord in that

peaceful household, was restless.

She threw the dog off her knee at last and limped fretfully about the room; with feverish fingers she tore open the Prince's letter, then cast it down.

The Countess noticed this and flushed.

"What have you read that displeases you?" she asked.

"What can I read that will please me?" flashed Anne. "What good news can come from a man ruined by his own folly?"

"You speak of my son," returned the Countess, trembling.

"I speak of the man who has reduced me to beggary," cried the Princess passionately. "And I will use my tongue as I list; it is you who do not use the respect you should--all of you--little nobles that you are, to the Elector Maurice's daughter."

The Countess rose.

"Had you been *my* daughter, you had been better bred," she said, "and learnt many a lesson at the rod's end. You may be finely born, but you are foully trained, or else you are mad, God pity you! If you were not my son's wife, I should have other things to say to you; since you are, I beg you to stay apart from me, for my soul is too troubled to support cursed humours."

Anne was silenced. The Countess, like William, could overawe her if she chose. The Princess shuddered with suppressed passion and, as always when defeated, hurried from the room.

The Countess seated herself, pale with distaste; such scenes as these, and worse, were but too common now. Anne had threatened

Count John with a dinner-knife, and again and again wounded her attendants with any weapon she could lay her hands on; Rénée bore a bruise on her forehead where the Princess had struck her with a wine-bottle.

"She is mad," said Magdalena, with the indignant frankness of youth. "She should be put away; indeed she should."

"I think she is mad," admitted Rénée slowly and humbly. She had so completely assumed the burden of Anne's life that she felt as if Anne's faults were her own; she rose now to follow the Princess.

"Stay here, you poor child," said the Countess of Nassau tenderly.

Rénée thanked her affectionately, but hastened after her mistress.

She dared not leave Anne alone; it was always before her, a constant terror, that Anne might escape to Cologne and utterly disgrace the Prince; and she felt intensely the responsibility of being the only one who knew how low Anne had descended, even in the days of her prosperity.

VI - THE PRINCE AT BAY

In that July, William moved to Strasburg, steadily and boldly preparing his advance against the Spaniards, his daring inroad into the Netherlands. He had now no allies save his brother Louis, who, in desperate want of money, with mutinous troops, was using all his brilliant audacity and resource to keep his men together in Friesland, where his barren victory of Heiliger Lee had been followed by no fruits save what little money he could wring from the Abbots of Wittewerum and Heiliger: Lee and the forced supplies obtained from the inhabitants of the district.

And against this force of ill-disciplined, ill-fed, mutinous, and ill-equipped troops, held together by one man's courage and influence, Alva himself was marching with fifteen thousand of his veteran regiments.

William, pressing forward his own preparations, using all his eloquence, all his energy to raise new levies, to obtain money, hardly dared to think of Louis awaiting the approach of Alva in the marshes of Friesland.

He had heard of the entire failure of the two other expeditions he had so carefully and adroitly planned, the utter annihilation of the forces of De Cocqueville and De Villars, and he had received an even more cruel blow in the news of the death of Adolphus; but in his own task he did not hesitate for a moment in his strenuous preparations, nor in his unfaltering endeavours.

He had now every one against him save his own family and a few faithful friends, such as Hoogstraaten and Culemburg. The Emperor, at first favourable to his enterprise, was now drawing closer in an alliance with Spain, and ordered the Prince to abandon the cause of the Netherlands on pain of forfeiting all his Imperial privileges and dignities; and the German Princes, from whose alliance William had hoped so much, became daily colder and colder in the cause of the unhappy Provinces.

And it was a cause that might seem indeed hopeless; so mighty and terrible was Alva, so supine, so stifled, so exhausted, so crouching the wretched people he had crushed beneath his armed feet and bound and gagged with the chains and bits of the Holy Inquisition.

Since the executions of Egmont and Hoorae the heart of the country seemed to cease to beat. Nowhere was any resistance made; the tyranny was too extensive, the punishment too swift and universal.

The people, drained of blood and money, bowed to the new power, went to mass, and feebly tried to pick up the threads of their former occupations.

No one came forward to join Louis, and fewer and more timid became the promises sent to the Prince.

He continued, however, to plan his own expedition as if all had been so far successful instead of completely disastrous.

The continued campaign of Louis in Friesland was against his advice; he wished his brother to fall back on Cleves instead of awaiting Alva's coming.

He himself had brought his levies from Cleves to Strasburg, where he was nearer the central Provinces and able to retreat into French territory if need were. He had good hopes from the French Huguenots; he was still on friendly territory, though far from Dillenburg and from Louis, whose news reached him slowly, passing as it did from hand to hand by secret agents across a country cowering under the Spanish rule. He was also on the borders of the Palatinate, and the Elector Palatine was warmer in the cause of the Netherlands than the Princes of Hesse or Saxony; the Court of Heidelberg was indeed the sure refuge for any exiled Protestant, and the stern Calvinist Frederic was moved by neither fear of Philip's power nor tolerance towards his faith.

But his present encouragement to William was little more than good wishes, for to him too the Provinces seemed lost.

It was in late July, when William was almost ready to take the field, that a knight with a few attendants rode into Strasburg and demanded to see the Prince of Orange.

He had no difficulty in obtaining his wish, for the German officers recognized him as the Landgrave William, son of Philip of Hesse and cousin to Anne of Saxony.

He found William and Count Hoogstraaten together in an upper chamber of the modest house where they lodged.

It was a sultry night and the windows were wide open; between them sat the Prince at a plain table writing by the light of a little copper lamp.

He was writing to his wife, and the words he penned as the Landgrave entered were these:--

"I go to-morrow, but when I shall return or when I shall see you I cannot, on my honour, tell you with certainty. I have resolved to place myself in the hands of the Almighty that He may guide me where it is His good pleasure that I should go. I see well enough that I am destined to pass this life in misery and labour--"

As he heard the door open, he closed his letter hastily and put it away.

As he rose to greet the Landgrave his eyes shone; he had a moment's hope that Hesse was sending troops to his aid, or at least bringing promises of future assistance.

Count Hoogstraaten also wore an eager look as he saluted the German Prince.

But the appearance of the Landgrave was neither cheerful nor hopeful; he seated himself heavily, took off his black silk hat, and wiped his forehead.

"It is something important," said William quickly, "that has brought

you from Hesse here to seek my poor company."

"I came myself," returned the Landgrave, "because my father could think of no better messenger. I have been at Dresden, and bear also the messages of the Elector Augustus."

"Ah!" said William softly.

He seated himself and glanced at Hoogstraaten.

The Landgrave was a man of blunt words and a stern courtesy; without preamble he came to what was the gist of his errand.

"Turn back--wait--leave the Provinces; it is impossible to assist them. No one can withstand Alva and his army."

This was the sum of what the Landgrave William had ridden rapidly from Hesse to say.

The argument was not new to William, already he had heard a great deal of such discouragement; but perhaps it had never before been put to him so weightily by so important a personage. He listened with his elbow on the desk and his chin in his hand, his firm, small-featured profile towards the speaker, his eyes cast down.

So plain was he, so modest were his appointments, that even the unimaginative mind of the Landgrave contrasted him with the gorgeous bridegroom who had come to Leipsic for his marriage seven years before.

"Have you not," he exclaimed, "sacrificed enough already? Are you not sufficiently stripped?"

"I am," answered William, "greatly hampered for want of money."

"How much have you on this enterprise?" asked the Landgrave.

"Everything," said the Prince, "all I and my brothers and my friends possess."

"Then you are rained men!"

"If we fail, yes," admitted William.

"It is not possible that you can succeed."

"It is not possible to turn back," replied the Prince, not arrogantly but rather gently.

"You defy the Emperor?" demanded the Landgrave hotly.

"I have answered the Emperor--I have answered King Philip--I have explained myself to all Europe." He exerted himself to speak pleasantly, but behind the tolerance of his tone was a certain indignation.

The Landgrave was baffled and irritated.

"You are obstinate, Highness, but that will not save you. What do you hope to do?"

"To enter the Netherlands while Louis holds Alva in check in Friesland."

"And if you fail? Can you pay the troops? Have you a means of retreat?"

"I have not counted the cost so closely," replied William. "I hope that the great cities will open to me and that I shall not lack wherewith to pay my troops--if not, I can but pledge my word that these debts shall

be redeemed when I can achieve the means."

"Do you ever hope to obtain your estates again?"

"I hope everything," said William, and he smiled with his unconquerable cheerfulness, which was like the cheerfulness of Louis, impervious to all attacks. Gloom, melancholy, and despondency were unknown to the House of Nassau. "And yet I expect nothing," he added. "I make neither boasts nor prophecies, Landgrave; I but take the instruments to my hand and do what I may with them."

"Your motive?" cried the other. "Is Your Highness ambitious or fanatic?"

The Prince replied rather wearily--

"I have proclaimed my motives again and again, Excellency. I have explained myself at every German Court, before England, before France--I fight Alva and the Spanish rule over the Netherlands."

"You fight King Philip," answered the Landgrave, "though you keep up a fiction of loyalty; and who do you think will unite with you against Spain, who is half the old world and all the new?"

William smiled again.

"Let him keep his new world and his old, I but want the Netherlands. Ah, Excellency," he added, "it is in your power to refuse me help and to turn your back on me--it is not in your power to discourage me nor hold me back."

The Landgrave rose impatiently with a rough gesture.

"You are madmen, you and your brothers, and will meet with the fate

of madmen."

The Prince thought of Adolphus, and winced.

"It may well be," he said quietly; "believe that we counted that cost before we undertook our tasks."

"It is useless to speak any more!" exclaimed the Landgrave angrily.

"On this subject, yes."

The Prince rose and held out his hand affectionately. "You will stay with us to-night?" he added with courtesy.

The Landgrave refused.

"I go to my lodging; I will come to-morrow to see if you are in a better frame of mind, Highness."

He saluted both, and abruptly left; the Prince returned to his unfinished letter.

"It is a strange thing," said Count Hoogstraaten, "how many are ready to hold a man back, how few to push him forward! Always these councils of prudence, of caution, of non-resistance, of humility, and cringing!"

And the fiery little soldier went angrily to the window and stared fiercely out on the hot night; there was something lion-like in his slender heavy-shouldered figure, in his blunt-featured face, in his pose of noble anger as he gazed out on the darkness as if it concealed the numberless hosts of his foes.

The Prince finished his letter and joined his friend in the window-place.

"If we live we shall succeed," he said. "If we die as the others died--well, a worse thing might befall us. And what does submission ever gain? Better to fall like Adolphus than like--Egmont."

His voice saddened on his friend's name and his eyes too turned towards the darkness as if he also pictured there the swarming battalions of his mighty enemies.

"We have had our pleasant times, Hoogstraaten," he added; "our gay morning was fair and easy, and now we are men and must take the labour and heat of the day--"

He stopped abruptly; his quick ear had caught the sound of an opening door. It was the Seigneur de Louverwal who entered; he carried dispatches which had, he said, been forwarded to one Van Baren an agent of the Prince in Brussels--and by him to Strasburg.

The letters were from Count Louis and the agent himself.

William's lips tightened, the blood receded from his dark cheek, and he caught his under lip with his teeth as he read his brother's letter.

It was written from a farmhouse on the German frontier, and announced the Count's pitiable and utter overthrow.

Out-manoeuvred by Alva, harassed by mutinous troops, lack of money, and provision, betrayed by his own fiery impatience, Louis had been driven to the village of Jemmingen on the Ems, and there his wretched forces had been wiped out by Alva's splendid army and Alva's cool skill.

Those who had escaped the battle were massacred; the blood of nearly ten thousand rebels had washed from Alva's laurels the stain left by the little victory of Heiliger Lee.

William read the letter over twice, then sank into a chair; he was never sanguine, but he had not been prepared for such a blow as this. He felt his head reel and his heart beat fast; the light of the little lamp grew dim before his eyes and the room dark. It was with an unsteady hand that he handed the letter to Hoogstraaten.

So the third of the armies he had got together with such infinite pains and toil and sacrifice had disappeared before Alva like chaff before a bright flame.

De Cocquille in Artois, De Villars in Juliers, Louis at Jemmingen--all defeated, utterly, completely, for ever.

A passionate exclamation broke from Hoogstraaten as he and De Louverwal read the dispatch; it roused William, who took up the agent's letter and read it slowly.

This contained fuller details of the disaster brought by a Spanish soldier to Maestricht, where Van Baren had been.

He now wrote to the Prince that only a handful of the rebels had escaped, and that they, with Count Louis, had swum the Ems and fled into Germany. He wrote of the ghastly butchery which had followed the victory, how all the dikes and swamps were red, and the sky red also with burning crops and houses, for Alva had laid waste Friesland from end to end, sparing neither woman nor child.

And against this background of horrors stood out the desperate heroism of Louis who had dashed again and again among his reluctant troops, who had hurled himself single-handed on the enemy, who had, when the gunners had fled, fired his only artillery--the Groningen cannon, the poor spoils of Heiliger Lee--with his own hand, going from one to the other with the fire-brand; and that desperate volley had been the last volley of the rebels.

When William read of his brother's piteous and splendid attempts to turn back the dark tides of disaster, when he read of the slaying and burning of his little army ("the dead were so thick they choked the river"), he rose with a movement of intolerable agony, and a sharp sound unconsciously escaped him--the cry of one swiftly and unexpectedly wounded.

"O Christ! O, Christ!" muttered Hoogstraaten, and he looked about him bewildered. "Who will give us levies now? How shall we do anything?"

De Louverwal turned his face away and wept.

The Prince still said nothing; he loosened his falling collar and wiped his face and neck bathed in cold sweat; he put his hand to his throat, and his lips parted as if he stifled; then he closed his mouth firmly and continued to pass the handkerchief over his face.

It was the same unconscious gesture of mental agony that Lamoral Egmont had used on the scaffold.

"Ah, Highness," cried Hoogstraaten--"ah, Highness, what news is this?" and his voice was hoarse with love and pity and wrath.

"Eh?" said the Prince faintly. "Eh?"

He turned to face his friend, and looked at him a moment almost blankly.

Then he spoke.

"We must go on there is the more need that we go on."

"Is it possible?" broke from De Louverwal.

"Before God, it is very possible," answered William, and his voice was suddenly strong.

He had now recovered complete mastery of himself; he sat down and wrote a letter of consolation and encouragement to Louis.

VII - THE ACTION ON THE GETA

The Duke of Alva marched back triumphantly from Groningen, celebrated the overthrow of Louis of Nassau with arrogant and hollow rejoicings in the overawed capital, tortured and beheaded several persons of distinction—including the brilliant and loyal Burgomaster of Antwerp, Anthony van Straaten—and offered up hundreds of lesser victims as thank-offerings on the altar of his success, and melted the famous Groningen cannon to cast a statue of himself.

Meanwhile William of Orange, by tireless exertions, indomitable patience, courage, and enthusiasm, and by superhuman straining of every nerve to raise the money, had assembled an army of thirty thousand men, and exercising his right as a sovereign Prince he declared war on the Duke of Alva, issued a proclamation of his motives to the Netherlands, and marched toward the frontier of Brabant, near Maestricht, where Alva was encamped.

He wished to hazard everything on one great battle where he might wipe out the disasters of Dalem, Artois, and Jemmingen, encourage his soldiers, and hearten the Netherlands.

But Alva would not give battle; his cold and cruel genius saw that his advantage lay in delay, that William had not the money to keep his army together long, and that the German mercenaries, unpaid and inactive, would soon mutiny and desert.

William saw this too, but it was impossible for him to entice the wily Spaniard into an engagement.

Meanwhile the main difficulty remained the money; every thaler the Nassau family could raise had gone on the three lost armies and on equipping the present one for the field. In his proclamation he had said with a touching courage and cheerfulness, "We have now an excellent army of cavalry, artillery, and infantry raised all at our own expense," but this 'excellent army' could not be kept together without pay or plunder, and the generous hand that had supplied them was now empty.

William appealed to the Netherlanders whom he was coming to rescue, but the three previous defeats had disheartened utterly the miserable populace, and it was but a wretched sum that the Prince received; three hundred thousand crowns had been promised to his agent, Marcus Pery, and but ten thousand reached the camp. Applications to the gentlemen who had signed Brederode's famous Compromise brought no results; and wherever the Prince's army moved the people fell away from his line of march, not daring to lift a hand in his service.

Well might one of the devices which showed on his banners be that of a pelican in her piety feeding her young with her own blood, for it was from themselves alone the Nassau Princes received support.

When the Prince mustered his army in Treves, he had with him the dauntless Louis, the young Henry, and Hoogstraaten, and he was soon joined by Lumey, Count de la Marck, at the head of a ferocious band of followers. This nobleman, reckless, rough, and daring was a blood kinsman of Lamoral Egmont, and had joined William out of motives of personal hate and revenge against Alva.

At St. Feit the Prince crossed the Rhine, then by a bold and brilliant

movement his army swam the Meuse (to Alva's incredulous rage), and marched into Brabant with all the pomp of war.

Nearly thirty times he changed his camp on the plains of Brabant, each time hoping to lure the Duke into an engagement; each time Alva, though for ever hanging on the skirts of the rebels, managed, with consummate skill, to refuse an action.

So passed the weary days of autumn; by the middle of October the Prince was at St. Trond, intending to effect a junction with a body of French Huguenots under De Genlis who were waiting at Waveren.

As always Alva was at the Prince's heels, skirmishing incessantly with the outposts, but always withdrawing his main army when William advanced for an engagement.

"This will end soon, one way or another," said the Prince. "Either we have a general action, or all is lost for this campaign."

He spoke in his tent at St. Trond to Louis and Hoogstraaten; outside were the camp noises and the slash of an autumn shower against the canvas.

Louis, almost ill with the irritation and fury of being constantly outmanoeuvred, of seeing the army slip from them while Alva quietly waited, half-crazed with the thought of his own powerlessness to avert the miserable failure of the campaign, made no answer, and Hoogstraaten could only gnash his teeth.

But William remained patient; perhaps he had not expected any more glorious results from this desperate venture.

Quietly he stated the position.

"It is impossible to pay the men another penny, or even to feed them

much longer. I heard to-day that Alva has dismantled all the mills in this district. There will, of course, be a mutiny--it is quite impossible to keep them together beyond November, which they take as the beginning of the winter."

"There must be an action!" cried Louis passionately. "There must be, if I ride into Alva's camp and challenge him to his face!"

And the Count shook with rage at the thought of this army, got together with such infinite sacrifices, being miserably disbanded.

But his impatience did not help, William would have reminded him of the results of his fiery recklessness at Jemmingen.

"Alva will never be enticed into an action," said Hoogstraaten, "he is as cold as this!" and he struck the steel hilt of his sword. "He is not Aremberg to be fired by his officers into an imprudence; he is a great general, though a cruel animal. God curse him."

"I salute his generalship," said William, with a bitter smile. "I admit he has defeated my hopes. One victory--one doubtful victory--and every city in the Netherlands would have opened to me, all over the country the people would have risen, for he rules by terror only. Now no one dares move--all silent, trembling--and I helpless," he added, with sudden passion, "my God, helpless!"

The exclamation was like a passionate prayer. William, young, ardent, full of courage and energy, felt that word "helpless" the most terrible of all.

But he instantly recovered himself with that mental strength that made all things possible to him.

"I must meet De Genlis, his reinforcements may be strong, he may have brought money," he said, then added with his unflinching

thoughtful generosity, "Besides he has made his way through the Ardennes to meet me, and I cannot fail him."

"Alva might attack as we cross the Geta," said Louis hopefully.

"It is possible--it might be done," answered the Prince.

"He is too cautious," said Hoogstraaten; "nothing will tempt him."

William rose, went to the entrance of the tent, and lifted the flap that concealed the October night.

The rain was now over and the moon had risen large and yellow, showing the encampment and the motionless lines of the ruined windmill that crowned the high hill opposite. Behind this hill flowed the Geta on the opposite bank of which Count de Genlis waited for William.

Beyond, where the dark clouds lay heavy on the horizon, was Alva, like a crouching beast, following his prey cautiously and waiting for it to fall exhausted ere he sprang.

The Prince's face hardened as he gazed at the ominous darkness faintly sprinkled with the Spanish camp fires; he thought of Egmont and Hoorne, Brederode, and Berghen--of Adolphus, and his own stolen son, his own insulted name, his own confiscated property; and against Philip and Philip's red right hand the hard old man crouching there with his talons deep in the flesh of the Netherlands--his whole soul went out in wrath and defiance and a hatred that was like a sensation of triumph and pleasure.

"Well, old man," he thought passionately, "I am loved here as you are hated--and some day that will tell."

He was joined by Hoogstraaten and Count Louis; all three were

almost without hope; all were living, and had long been living, a life of hardship, privation, and peril; all of them faced a prospect of either violent death or utter beggary and exile, yet their mutual youth, courage, and energy communicated to each other, together with the sense of love and comradeship, made them almost joyful.

They began discussing plans for the crossing of the Geta to-morrow.

A force was to be stationed on the hill, which rose now blackly against the moonlit sky, to protect the crossing of the main body of the troops, while the rearguard under Hoogstraaten was to remain on the bank in a desperate attempt to lure Alva.

In case this was successful and the Spaniard advanced his main army, William and Louis were to recross the Geta and engage.

The plan was desperate, and William could hardly place much reliance on it, but Hoogstraaten was exultant at the chance of coming to grips with the enemy.

Louis felt some vexation that the command of the rearguard had not been given to him; the truth was William relied more on Hoogstraaten's coolness than Louis' audacity in this perilous and delicate position.

"You have Jemmingen against me!" said Louis, with a laugh, and he pulled at his orange sash with strong impatient fingers.

"Confess, Count," cried Hoogstraaten gaily, "that your retreat then was unnecessary and that Alva does not deserve to be so feared! Here we have been several days in the Netherlands and we have seen nothing of the Spaniards but their backs!"

"And when you see their faces," replied Louis, vexed, "I warrant you

will remember it for the rest of your life."

Hoogstraaten caught his arm and begged his forgiveness for the rough jest.

"Ah, jest while you can," said Louis, instantly smiling again.

"A light heart never hurt any cause," said William.

He dropped the tent flap and called his page; bidding the boy give him his sword, his mantle, and his hat, and to have his horse brought, he prepared to make a tour of his forces and see all was in readiness for the morrow.

The Count Louis and Hoogstraaten departed on the same business to their several commands; first all three embraced warmly, and, in case they should not meet again before the bustle and confusion of the morning, William gave Hoogstraaten some parting words of encouragement.

Despite their terrible anxieties and the agonizing difficulties of their position, the three commanders were now cheerful, almost gay.

The night was beautiful, warm, lit by the mellow light of the harvest moon and fragrant with the smell of the earth recently moistened by the rain.

The Prince's men, as if encouraged by the decisive action promised for the morrow, were also quiet and seemed cheerful; a few days before there had been a fierce mutiny, when the Prince's sword had been shot from his side, but now all was tranquil, and William was loyally received as he went on his rounds.

Some of the refugee Netherlands were gathered together in an open space between the tents listening to the words of a Calvinist

minister; little groups of others, scattered here and there, sang psalms softly to themselves.

The German mercenaries were engaged in mending their clothes, in cooking their supper, or in playing dice.

The keen smell of coarse hot soup, the strong scent of the picketed horses mingled on the fresh air; the light of the lanterns at the tent entrances and the small fires feebly rising after the shower shone on pots and pans, pieces of polished or rusty armour, bundles of kindling sticks covered with autumn leaves, and baskets of apples and pears, golden-red.

Here and there the windows of the little farmhouses and cottages where the officers were quartered glowed with a bright light.

William, riding with his little band of officers from one battalion to another, dreamt of a victory, of turning back Alva's troops, of breaking his prestige, of a whole country throwing off with groans of relief the loathed Spanish chains and welcoming her deliverers.

He had no grounds for such dreams but the sense of life and strength in his own body, in the fine horse beneath him, in the exaltation he received in gazing at the noble cloudy spaces of the sky, and the great moon that had shone on so many battles, and in the dark outlines of the hills and horizons of the hidden country.

Nor was he disheartened by the sight of the surgeon with his mule and cases going from tent to tent, nor by that of a cartful of dead men whose limbs fell limp as rags and whose bodies were defaced with gunshot; near these victims of a little skirmish was a tent of men, ill of a malarious fever, the sharp delirious voices of some came out on to the night.

The Prince continued on horseback till the dawn, when he returned to his tent to arm, and the army moved into battle array.

The sun rose strong and clear though with the mellow radiance of the Low Countries and the autumn; all that had been obscured by the dead light of the moon was now distinct: the scars and rags of the soldiers, the brilliant scarves of the officers, the disorder and dirt of the camp, the broken sails of the tall thatched windmill, the dried autumn grass on the little hill, the low waters of the Geta sparkling a sluggish gold.

Still all seemed hopeful, cheerful, full of presages of good fortune.

Birds were singing in the trees growing in the farm gardens, a few poppies and daisies blew on the hillsides, the sun was warm as summer but the air fresh with the coolness of the turn of the year.

William rode with his troops to the banks of the Geta, and sent them across in good order and safety, battalion after battalion.

The Spanish, whose outposts were near enough to observe these movements, made no sign of action.

Meanwhile, Hoogstraaten remained behind on the bank with three thousand men, while the Seigneur de Louverwal and a detachment of cavalry occupied the hill.

Steadily and successfully the Prince's army forded the river, regiment after regiment passing undisturbed, the infantry on the cruppers of the horsemen or wading at their stirrups. Again and again William glanced at the little hill where the patriotic banners of Hoogstraaten waved.

About noon the Spanish attacked.

Don Frederic, the Prior of St. John, brought up seven thousand troops and threw himself against the Netherlands.

All was obscured in the lilac-coloured smoke of cannon and musket shot with flames; William could no longer see his banners nor the gallant lines of Hoogstraaten's men.

The Spanish did not cross the river, as the three leaders had so desperately hoped, nor could William return, as the further bank was now lined by Alva's cannon.

No news came from the fierce conflict surging to and fro by the waters of the Geta, but towards evening the foul smoke cleared, and the Spanish flag was visible floating from the shot-riddled windmill.

A little later a few soldiers escaped across the river, bringing to the Prince news that the entire rearguard had been cut to pieces, that Louverwal was a prisoner, and that the survivors of the awful day were now being massacred by Don Frederic's men.

Another miserable handful brought with them Hoogstraaten, unconscious, fastened to his horse by the reins, and with a shattered foot.

All that night the moonlight was dimmed by the fires that burnt along the Geta.

These flames came from the farmhouses where Hoogstraaten's men had taken a despairing refuge. Don Frederic had at once ordered these buildings to be set alight, and those maddened wretches who hurled themselves from the flames found themselves impaled on the spears of the Spanish waiting without.

The nobler spirits put an end to their own lives to escape the taunts of their enemies; all alike disappeared in the same funeral pyres, the

high-mounting flames of which illuminated the fierce faces of the victorious army and the stately figure of the militant priest who commanded them, and cast a red glow of blood and fire on those two triumphant symbols--the arms of the King of Spain, the cross of the Romish Church.

VIII - THE ANABAPTIST PREACHER

A few days after this fourth disaster the Prince joined the Huguenots at Waveren.

These allies, late as they were, might have proved of some material assistance, for they consisted of three thousand foot and three hundred horse--all eager Protestants, not hired mercenaries, but as soon as he rode into the French camp the Prince saw that he was face to face with another disappointment.

The little force of Count de Genlis was so hampered with women and children, aged folk and infirm, that it was likely to prove rather a burden than a relief to the over-taxed resources of the Prince.

The Huguenots indeed rather seemed a band of refugees escaping from destruction themselves than an army marching to the rescue of persecuted brethren.

Even De Genlis, the high-spirited and gallant French commander, could not advise William to try another engagement in the Netherlands, though they were within a few leagues of Brussels and of Lorraine.

And William was as helpless as if his hands and feet were tied. He could neither pay his men, nor feed them; every day some deserted. Alva's masterly tactics had succeeded; the Prince's army was dispersing without having accomplished anything but the ruin of their

commander, for William was personally pledged for the payment of the troops, and he had neither property nor credit with which to redeem his word.

He had staked heavily and lost heavily, and now stood stripped and beggared before the world.

In his camp at Waveren he faced his position which he saw clearly for all his cheerfulness; he admitted that Alva had out-generated him, but not in that was his bitterest disappointment, but in the silence of the Netherlands.

He had believed that the people would rise to welcome him; he had hoped that some cities would open their gates to him, he had been confident that the nobles and merchants would assist him with money.

He had not sufficiently reckoned on the strength of terror which Alva had inspired, nor on the awful condition of the unfortunate Netherlander.

He who had always been used to princely dealings, to use generosity and lavishness to all, was now bitterly humiliated and galled by his inability to redeem his solemn promise; and that to him was the bitterest part of his universal failure. Alva's triumph, the disappointment of his friends, his own lost prestige, and disgrace, his own personal beggary--these things did not move him as did the thought of the weary mutinous soldiers whom he could not pay, nor, as far as he could see, would be ever able to pay.

Winter was approaching, the land was as barren, the weather as chill, as the prospects of William of Orange.

As he sat in his tent this late October evening he felt the cold wind

creep under the canvas and penetrate his mantle so that he shivered. His camp furniture was in some disorder, and half the large tent was curtained off by a handsome purple hanging.

Behind this lay Count Hoogstraaten. William had ordered him to be removed into his own tent, because neither he nor any man would long have the company of Hoogstraaten now.

The surgeon came from this inner apartment and said the Count slept.

William's eyes looked a question.

"When he wakes?" said the surgeon. "I fear, Your Highness, that when he wakes it will be but a waking to death."

He bowed and took his leave; he had many cases in the camp.

The Prince turned his gaze towards the purple curtains and leant back heavily in his chair. It seemed as if all his friends, all who loved him, trusted him, served him, were to be taken from him, involved in the common misfortune he had brought on them.

It seemed ironical, a needless cruelty, that the brave, generous, and gay Hoogstraaten should die.

His wound had been caused by the chance discharge of his own pistol, and at first had not seemed dangerous, but he had sunk into weakness and fever, a sickness perhaps as much of a despairing mind as of a wounded body, and now he lay slipping into death.

It had been an added torture to William to listen to the sick man's delirium--all on the theme of the dissolving army, the fruitless campaign, the liabilities of the commanders, the useless slaughter on the Geta, for which the poor Count held himself responsible.

"Supplies, supplies, if we could but get supplies, if we could but keep the men together!" had been the burden of the dying soldier's delirium, and William passionately wished that some good news might come if only to allow Hoogstraaten to die in peace.

But no good news did come; rather was misfortune heaped on misfortune.

The Prince held now in his hand letters from Dillenburg received a few days ago; Count John wrote with the gallant Nassau cheerfulness, but could not disguise that he sent evil tidings.

Anne of Saxony had seized the moment of her husband's ruin to forsake him; despite the letters of the Prince, the expostulations of her German kinsfolk and the Nassau women, Anne had flung herself free of all loyalty, and broken the bonds which had so long been hateful. She had written to Alva, throwing herself on his mercy and declaring she was a widow in the eyes of the law, as her husband was a prescribed exile with no civil rights, and entreating the Duke to return her her dowry out of William's confiscated property.

Then, abandoning her daughter and her baby son, she had fled from Dillenburg to Cologne and there set up a household of her own, surrounded by the exiles and refugees that crowded the city.

The news had not much power to hurt William's heart, his wife had been so long, even from the first, indifferent to him, and he could despise her disloyalty; but it was another blow to his pride, his dignity, the completion of his ruin, another cause for his enemies to laugh at him. "Madame your wife," had always been one of the objects of Granvelle's keen sneers, and the Cardinal, watching events from Rome, would sneer indeed now, as he would sneer at the army so painfully collected, so miserably dispersed, at the Prince

who had defied the King of Spain and been beaten from his country's frontiers, a beggared exile.

It was not in William's nature to feel wrathful towards the woman who had so struck him, his sentiment now was a vast indifference, as if she had never existed, or only existed as some shadow from whom he was at last for ever free.

As he sat there in a loneliness only peopled by bitter and sad reflections and the spectres of ruin, failure, and despair, two of the officers attached to his person entered the tent.

The Prince looked up sharply, as if bracing himself to hear further disaster.

But the officers came with news of trifling importance: A fellow, evidently a Netherlander, had made his way into the camp last night and had entreated most earnestly for an audience of the Prince, and had gone from one officer to another with such importunate eagerness, that at length they had been moved to prefer his request to the General himself.

William had always been easy of access in the days of his prosperity, and it was not in him to surround himself with state in this time of his misfortune and overthrow.

He smiled faintly, drawing his brows together as he did when perplexed or amused.

"Let him come here," he said.

One of the officers suggested that perhaps the fellow was one of Alva's spies or assassins.

"Oh, that!" exclaimed William wearily.

Death was the least of the terrors with which he had to contend; he knew that probably Alva schemed to murder him, and it left him as indifferent as did the thought of Anne's treachery.

As soon as the officers left him he retired so completely into his own thoughts again that he forgot the incident, and it was with a slight start that he looked up to see a stranger, escorted by two soldiers, standing before the tent entrance.

This man stood very humbly bowing, as if too overcome by some emotion to speak, and William, interested in him, bade him enter, and dismissed the soldiers.

The stranger was of middle life with the appearance of humble birth and poor means; his clothes, though exquisitely neat, were shabby and thin; his features were pinched with cold, and maybe privation.

He stood crushing his hat to his breast and gazing at the Prince with an expression of utter confusion and awe.

William addressed him in Flemish, kindly asking him his errand.

The other continued to gaze at him with that look of wonder and reverence that was embarrassed but not at all stupid, rather a kind of amaze, as if he could not credit that this slim young man, with the pale dark face, wrapped in the plain blue mantle could be the great Prince of Orange.

"It is His Highness?" he asked timidly.

"I am William of Orange," answered the Prince, and as he spoke he felt that it was the name of the most unfortunate of men.

As the man seemed to need further encouragement, William added,

"It was he you wished to see?"

"I have come all the way from Holland to see Your Highness," was the simple reply.

"From Holland? Alone?"

"Yes, Your Highness. It is a long way, and the Duke of Alva's army was often in my way--otherwise I would have been with Your Highness sooner," he added, in a tone of deprecating apology.

The Prince looked keenly at the quiet-looking individual who had undertaken with such simplicity a journey which meant risking his life a thousand times.

"Who are you, my friend?" he asked gently.

The man raised his eyes which under this gaze he had kept abased, and William was instantly conscious of a resolute and fearless spirit looking out of the plain insignificant face.

"I am an Anabaptist preacher, Your Highness; I have a little congregation of poor outcasts in Holland--we mostly live in hiding, and meet secretly to worship. There are not so many of us as there were, for the persecutions have been very fierce and we are quite defenceless.

"A little while ago a gentleman of Haarlem smuggled into the town a copy of Your Highness's most noble proclamation, and it came into my hands.

"That day I knelt to bless God for having raised up such a Prince, and when my poor people met together again I read them the joyful news, and told them that Your Highness appealed for money to support your army, whereat we, with a good heart, put together what we

could, and as I was the only one who had no one dependent on me and knew the country well, I was elected to carry this small offering to Your Highness."

The Prince was too overwhelmed to speak; his quick mind, his warm heart, pictured the whole incident: The hunted outcast Protestants reading his paper, their eager gratitude and hopes, the secret putting together of what they could pinch from their poverty, the setting forth of the pastor, the perils and anxieties of his journey with his precious burden, his self-denial and hardship rather than touch his treasure, the modest unconsciousness with which he made his little speech--all this William saw vividly.

"Your Highness in your paper speaks of repayment," continued the Anabaptist, "but we require no payment, only kindness when Your Highness shall be triumphant."

Cautiously he took from the wallet at his side a small canvas bag, and, gazing at it with a look of relief and a touch of pride, laid it on the little table beside the Prince.

With a movement almost mechanical William untied the strings and looked at the contents.

There were about a hundred crowns in gold and some silver--this last what the pastor had saved on his journey by sleeping in ditches and almost starving.

"It is very little," said the Anabaptist nervously, oppressed by the silence of the Prince; "the will is better than the gift."

William remained motionless, staring at the pitiful little bag of money which represented such a spirit of sacrifice, such an enthusiasm still existent in the country he had deemed supine and crushed.

"I thank you," he faltered, "indeed--I--thank you--" A hundred crowns! and one month's wage of his army was some hundreds of thousands of crowns. A hundred crowns! A few years ago he had flung away as much on a pair of gauntlets--a dog--a toy; the smallness of the gift moved the Prince almost beyond bearing. He held out his hand towards the Anabaptist, and he, who had endured the loss of his brother, his friends, his wife, his army, his fortune, with fortitude, now broke down before this humble sympathy.

Putting his other hand before his eyes, he wept.

"Your Highness will receive more," stammered the pastor. "There are other Protestant congregations who are collecting for you--even if the big towns do not open, you have entered the hearts of the Netherlanders."

The Prince's shoulders heaved; he raised his face, flushed and quivering with tears.

"I thank you," he repeated, in a firm voice. "I thank you from my heart--you see me weak, but you must not notice it--I have not slept well of late. I will give you my receipt for this money and you must thank your people for me, and tell them I will repay them as soon as I can repay any of my debts--and for yourself take this, in remembrance of me," he drew from his finger a little yellow intaglio seal ring--one of the few personal jewels left him--and put it on the thin finger of the Anabaptist who bent before him in speechless gratitude and pleasure.

Promising to see him again before his departure, the Prince was sending away the preacher in the custody of his page, that the poor traveller might enjoy the best hospitality the camp could afford, when the Anabaptist turned and asked with a timid earnestness, "Are the faith of Your Highness and that faith you come to protect, the same?"

"My faith?" repeated William.

"Forgive me, but it is not commonly known if you follow the true religion."

"I follow what I believe to be true," said the Prince. "Otherwise I could not go on. For the rest, I am no Romanist." He paused a moment, then added with a little smile, "If any of your people ask after me, tell them that I too am an outcast and an exile--that I, too, am a heretic. Say, too, that I am not discouraged, that if I fail now I shall endeavour to try again. Ask them to be courageous and to give me their prayers."

When he was alone again he lifted the curtains and went to Count Hoogstraaten's bedside.

The gallant little soldier lay propped on pillows and covered with rugs; the dim light of a shaded lamp fell on the bold young face which, in the last few days, had changed so terribly, and over which the shadow of death now rested.

He was tossing in a restless sleep; William went on his knees beside him and put his cool hand on the hot forehead dewed with beads of pain and exhaustion.

The Count lay quiet awhile, then opened his eyes; he recognized the Prince immediately, and at once his dry lips began to murmur the words that were the expression of the mental agony that was killing him--

"Any news? Any supplies? Any money raised? Any means of keeping the men together?"

William firmly clasped the feverish hand that lay outside the coverlet.

"Help has come," he answered; "but now I have left a man who brought me supplies from Holland--and there are other promises of assistance."

A light came into the dying man's eyes. His tense body relaxed with a shiver of relief.

"Then--then you will be able to carry on the campaign?" he said faintly.

"With God's help I shall go on," answered the Prince gravely.

"Supplies, you say--from Holland?" murmured Hoogstraaten.

"Just brought into the camp--in gold," said William, "and, as I said, there are other promises; many, many are willing to help us--the country begins to move in our favour."

The Count closed his eyes and was silent, but his face relaxed into a look of content, and William blessed the hundred crowns of the Anabaptist that had served to soothe the bitterness of failure and death for his friend.

For a while they remained thus, the Prince kneeling and holding the tired right hand that had been unfailing in his service, the Count with his face pressed to the pillow and his eyes closed.

William thought of the tumultuous days in Antwerp when Hoogstraaten, and he only, had stood faithfully and bravely by his side thought of all the long, loyal, sincere friendship that went back to the old gay times of feast and joust, hawking and hunting the times when neither Anthony de Lalaing nor he had ever dreamt of such an hour as this. He thought, too, of the Countess at Dillenburg--waiting--already in mourning for one brother dead, and one doomed to die--waiting for the news--the news which would be that of a third

bereavement; he thought of Anne at Cologne, cringing before Alva, and wondered if she would not be glad if her husband, that great heretic and rebel, was dead too.

Towards midnight the sick man spoke again, recommending his poor wife he said twice, with a great sigh, "My poor wife!"--to the Prince, and begging him help, should occasion offer, his child, for the Count was beggared in the cause for which he died, and the Montmorencys, his wife's people, were more than beggared.

"Not to be a burden to you," he insisted in his weak, hoarse voice, "but--what you can--if Hoorne had been here--"

William promised, and the Count carried the Prince's hand to his heart and held it there.

He was now so clearly failing that Louis and other officers came to say farewell; he was still a Romanist, but there was no priest in the camp. A Lutheran minister brought him what comfort he could.

"It is no matter," said Hoogstraaten, who was now past formulas. "God must judge of me--into Thy hands--into Thy hands--"

Before the dawn he died, and the party he had espoused was the poorer for his loss, and the Prince a lonelier man.

"I am glad you have the supplies," were his last words, spoken so low that none but William, who held his head on his breast, could hear. "I am glad that gold came from Holland."

William, too, was glad for many reasons.

IX - WINTER TIME

The castle of Dillenburg was now a house of mourning, the Countess of Hoogstraaten now wore black also; all the women went softly, talking in whispers, and shuddering when a messenger rode into the courtyard.

Count John was desperately employed in raising money for the Prince; a further mortgage was put on such lands as they still could control, further portions of the Prince's possessions--those few he had retained for himself were sold; his chapel furniture was melted to obtain the gold and silver it contained, he had himself sold by auction all his camp equipment--even his horses, his weapons, his armour--leaving himself with one mount, one sword, one suit of mail like any poor trooper.

He had sent orders that his remaining household should be dismissed. Some had gone with Anne to Cologne; others, scenting ruin, had already dispersed; the remainder left, now returning to their homes or seeking other employment. The Prince, who had been the most richly attended of any man in the Netherlands, had now not one servant; and he, the splendour of whose garments had been one of the glories of the capital, now wrote to his brother to send him "Two more pair of hose--the mended silk ones in my cabinet and those under repair at the tailor"; he who had always been regally magnificent in his gifts, now besought John to "find a good grey horse, which might be paid for by one of the silver ornaments still remaining in my cabinet, or a piece of the chapel service," with which to reward one of his faithful agents.

He had tried to persuade his troops to take service with the French Huguenots, but they had refused, and demanded to be led back to Germany; he was accordingly at Strasburg, where he disbanded this army on which so many gallant hopes had been set, and which had ruined him so utterly.

The gloom deepened over Dillenburg, even John, usually so resolute and cheerful, appeared sombre; he too was almost ruined; his fortune and his children's heritage had largely vanished in this fruitless and fatal campaign; he saw himself burdened with debts and liabilities which it was scarcely possible he could ever repay.

The women cried in secret, but were outwardly serene, and Juliana of Stolberg wrote encouraging letters to the Prince and to Louis, and her dreads and terrors only showed for an instant in the words with which she besought them to have a care of Henry and not needlessly risk his young life.

In this household Rénée le Meung still lingered, supported by the kindness of the Countess of Nassau and her daughters in what was the blackest period of her sad life.

In the flight of Anne she saw her own failure, the collapse of her own long years of patient labour all had been useless. Anne had fulfilled her destiny, and the waiting-woman was left without occupation and without any object in life--behind her the wasted barren years, before her a hopeless future.

She was as bankrupt as the Prince and as lonely.

It was clear she could not remain at Dillenburg; she was but a burden and an encumbrance in a household beginning to be run with the strictest economy. Anne had fiercely refused to take her to Cologne, nor did Rénée wish to go, for her influence over the Princess had ceased and Anne was openly defying her husband and her kinsfolk.

She was living at Cologne surrounded by any rabble she could find to sympathize with her, and she had put her legal affairs--her frantic attempts to recover her property, and her wild expedients to raise money--into the hands of Jan Rubens, the Brussels' lawyer.

Rénée sickened to think of this; her whole spirit was crushed by the misfortunes which had overwhelmed not only her country and her faith but all she cared for, and the little world in which she had moved and served.

There was no further occupation for her at Dillenburg; William's children were in charge of his mother and sisters and of the Landgravine Elisabeth, Count John's wife.

The Court of the Elector Palatine--that refuge of all persecuted Protestants--occurred to Rénée; some German ladies she had known at Dresden were prepared to welcome her there.

She suggested this plan to the Countess of Nassau one heavy November day when they walked in the castle gardens to catch the faint chill glimpse of the winter sun.

"You, too, are eager to leave us!" exclaimed the Countess, who could not forget Anne's fierce denunciations of the dulness of the life at Dillenburg.

"No, Madame, no," said Rénée eagerly; "but I must work--in some way I must justify my life--or die."

Juliana pressed her hand kindly.

"I know, my child, I know. There is indeed nothing but idleness for you here where we women are too many already."

"It is terrible to be a woman!" cried Rénée. "Too many, ah yes, too many!"

"But we are not useless," said the Countess gently.

The waiting-woman answered with passionate conviction--

"Not such women as you with five sons! but women such as I! I am like a dead leaf before the breeze; if I am cast away and lost, no one will be the poorer. If I had been a man, however mean and humble, I could have followed--followed," she avoided the Prince's name, "the Protestant flag--I could have at least died. It is not even permitted to women to die nobly."

The Countess looked at her curiously and was silent. To Juliana also the enclosed life of a woman seemed at times terrible; there was something awful in this post in the background, always to be patient, always serving, always waiting--worst of all, the waiting.

At that moment the fate of the women seemed worse than that of the men; their piteous figures stood out mournfully against the red background of the persecutions and the war: Sabina of Egmont left starving with her children at the mercy of the man who had slain her husband; the Dowager Countess of Hoorne, having lost one son on the scaffold, moving heaven and earth to save the other from a similar fate; Hélène, Montigny's wife, widowed after a four month's marriage, and weeping a husband enclosed in the hopeless depths of a Spanish prison; the Countess of Hoogstraaten, ruined, thrice bereaved; the Countess of Aremberg suddenly widowed; and all those more obscure women who were orphaned, bereft of husband and child, spurned from their dismantled homes to beg or starve.

Perhaps it was better to be a man and face a swift death in the open field.

"But we have no choice," said the Countess, with a little smile that creased her fresh wrinkled face; "we must do what falls to our lot and not think of the difficulties."

"What falls to me?" asked Rénée; "no one wants me, nor ever has

since my mother died. The Princess always hated me. I made no friends; my home, my family, was swept away in a ruin that has pursued everything I have loved or cared for ever since--my country, my faith, my--"

She checked herself suddenly and went pale.

"...Your love?" finished the Countess softly. "Surely you have loved some one?"

Rénée hesitated a moment then answered in a low voice--

"Yes, I loved. Some one who is not of my station and who hardly knows my name nor my face. He--he went to the war, and he, like all, is quite mined now and quite desolate. Probably I shall never see him again."

She stopped suddenly and faced the Countess, her warm rich beauty glowing in the grey air against the grey background of garden wall and castle.

"That is my story and my life," she said. "What would you do with such a life, Madame?"

Truly the Countess did not know; her own years had been so full that she could not picture an empty existence.

"You cannot understand," added Rénée, "what it is to mourn the loss of what you never had."

"You will love again," said the Countess, whose outlook was eminently practical and sane, "or at least you will take a husband, and then your life will be full."

"Some women love once only, alas for them!" answered Rénée,

"perhaps it is a foolishness, but one cannot change one's heart."

Then she shrank into herself and was once more enfolded in reserve deeper than before, as if afraid of having said too much.

The sun had disappeared now, to be seen no more that day, and dark clouds full of rain or perhaps snow closed over the sky. The two women returned to the castle, which was cheerful with the light of great wood fires and pleasant with the sound of children playing.

By the hooded chimney-piece of the dining-room, where the meal was being already prepared, sat Vanderlinden, the Elector Augustus' alchemist. He had been sent by his master, who still placed implicit faith in his charts and tables, to persuade Count John that further exertions on the behalf of the Netherlands were useless, and that the stars plainly indicated that the Prince should return to Germany and not risk his fortunes further.

It was strange to Rénée to see the old man and recall how she had last seen him at the brilliant Leipsic wedding, and to think of all that had gone between, and how that famous marriage had ended, and yet how, in a circle, things had come round, and how Augustus was still consulting the stars and casting horoscopes and charts, and the alchemist still searching for the Philosopher's Stone and only a little greyer and more bent than before.

His talk was still of his experiments; outside events had touched him very little, and he took but a slight interest in the tasks of fortune-telling the Elector, his patron, set him. His eyes were still fixed on the Great Discovery, the *magnum opus*—eternal gold, eternal youth, eternal health—and in the pursuit of this object, for which he had lost both gold, youth, and health, he was as eager and as sanguine as he had ever been.

He remembered Rénée, and asked if she still had the charm he had given her; she showed it to him instantly, her only ornament, hidden in the folds of her cambric vest.

She asked the old man if he had heard of Duprès, and he told her calmly, without surprise, that the skryer, after escaping from the bloody rout of Jemmingen, had returned to him at Dresden and begged to be taken into his old master's service.

"They always return at length these restless rascals," added Vanderlinden. "And I have taken him back, for he is clever, and when the mood is on him can raise the spirits in the crystal."

So Duprès' tale had ended in a circle too, and he was back again at his old employment under his old master; somehow Rénée was glad that he was not in Cologne.

The Countess of Nassau joined the two as they stood and talked by the fire.

"Well, Magister," she said, "do you still hope to find the Philosopher's Stone?"

"I do not despair at all, Your Excellency," he answered quietly.

"But if there is no such stone?" asked the Countess.

He smiled as one who cannot restrain his amusement at the foolishness of the ignorant.

"It has been discovered, Madame, many times," he answered gently.

"And always lost again?"

"And always lost."

"That is strange, Magister, that more care was not taken to preserve such a secret."

"Ah, Madame, it is too great a thing to be lightly imparted from one man to another; it can only be attained after much labour, much suffering, prayer, and humiliation."

"It would change the world," said Rénée, and she thought of the Prince and how gold was all the difference between success and failure. William had failed through lack of it; for that reason Alva might fail too.

"It would be a terrible power," added the Countess thoughtfully. "Perhaps it is as well that it is not often discovered."

The old man stroked his beard and looked into the fire silently; he seemed so humble, so serene, so insignificant, that Rénée wondered why he was so eager for gold and power. Then she thought that perhaps he cared for neither, and that he had pitted himself against this secret as William had pitted himself against Philip, and that in both it was not the thought of the reward that urged them on to undertake tasks seemingly impossible, but the glory of the struggle, the mighty pleasure of overcoming, the ultimate hope of attainment.

"And my sons?" asked Juliana of Stolberg; "what disastrous prophecies have you made against the House of Nassau?"

Vanderlinden came from his dreams with a sigh.

"They might all be safe if they would be warned," he said. "Your Excellency heard that an astrologer warned Count Hoorne not to go to Brussels? And yet he went and died."

"A brave man cannot take these warnings," said the Countess stoutly. "It is not for Princes and leaders to count the cost of the steps they make, nor to think of their own lives."

"Then my charts and tables are useless," replied the alchemist.

"They please the Elector," said Juliana.

The alchemist was silent; he knew himself that his prophecies did little more than amuse his master.

"You shall speak to Count John, as the Elector bade you," resumed the Countess, "but you will not suppose that any one can turn back the Count nor his brothers from what they have set their hands to."

She spoke with pride and courage, but sorrowfully, as one who sees clearly and unfalteringly ahead and sees nothing but grief and trouble.

With an unconscious gesture of patience she folded her hands together and looked at the window against which big drops of rain were beginning to splash.

Her thoughts had returned to her three defeated sons at Strasburg, as the alchemist's thoughts had returned to the Elixir of life and wealth. Rénée, standing between them, felt forgotten by both; she, too, was thinking of Strasburg and of the man there disbanding his troops in humiliation and failure.

X - THE ABBESS

It was a day in early spring--spring, yet sharp and chill with winter--that the three penniless and defeated Nassau Counts rode through France to offer their swords--all they had now to offer--to the Prince

de Condé, who was upholding the Protestant cause in France.

Eight thousand of their men had been slain during the campaign, thirty thousand had been disbanded at Strasburg, and a little handful of cavalry had elected to follow the fortunes of the three adventurers, for the exiled, landless, and ruined brothers were now no better in the eyes of Europe.

With all their strenuous exertions and the energetic help of Count John, they had not been able to even half pay the troops.

William had personally undertaken to discharge this debt from the first money he could command, and solemnly promised, that if he should return alive from Condé's army still penniless, he would surrender his person as hostage for their money.

Before he left Germany he endeavoured to come to a meeting with his wife; but Anne could not or would not move, and it was without seeing her again that he left his native country to take service under a foreign flag.

Granvelle, snug in Rome, laughed; Alva celebrated in Brussels an extravagantly arrogant open triumph; Philip triumphed quietly within his own cold narrow heart.

So ended the first straggle between William of Orange and the power of Spain; so, stripped even of fame and glory, laughed at by his enemies, despaired of by his friends, did he, who had been one of the greatest and most magnificent Princes of his time, ride into exile.

Yet neither William nor his brothers were gloomy; there was a music in their souls, a fire in their blood, that ever kept them from melancholy; even when they spoke of Adolphus or Hoogstraaten, it

was with an affectionate smile, almost gaily, as they knew these dead would have wished them to speak.

Skirting Switzerland the little company passed into Franche Comte, and one of their first halting-places was near Besanson.

The morning after they had pitched their tents William was riding slowly through the fields which were beginning to be faintly coloured with the first trembling spring flowers.

A little thicket of hawthorn concealed the high road, and beyond the meadows woods sloped over undulating valleys and gently rising hills; numberless birds were singing in the little copse, and the sky was a delicate azure veiled with milk-white clouds; it was the first day of real spring, of the awakening of the earth, of the return of the promise of life, increase, and abundance.

William had not been long alone in his musing progress through the fields when he was joined by Count Henry.

This youth, in his green vesture, his little helmet with the long, single heron's feather, with his gay carriage, his handsome face and eager expression, was as bright as the morning, as pleasant as the early spring.

He spoke to his brother with a little laugh, as if greatly amused.

"There is a party of travellers who are afraid of us! They have sent a messenger to know if they may safely pass along the road where we are encamped."

William, too, smiled.

"Give them all assurances, Henry," he answered, "that we are not robbers, even if we are outlaws."

"Will you not see the messenger?" asked the young Count. "They seem people of distinction."

The two turned back across the fields to the outskirts of the camp where the messenger waited; he was a young Frenchman, well set up and armed, he seemed a squire or upper servant.

"This is the Prince of Orange," said Henry.

The fellow pulled off his cap.

"I salute Your Highness," he said rather defiantly. "And, as your intentions in this country are not known, I am here to know if the ladies under my care may pass your encampment?"

"You should need no assurance," replied the Prince coldly. "You know who I am."

The Frenchman remained obstinate, though he flushed a little under the rebuke.

"The ladies I escort are nuns--an abbess and her train," he replied, "and Your Highness is a heretic and rumoured to be joining Condé--"

"Ah," smiled William. "You think the heretics war on women as the Papists do? Go and tell your mistress that she has my word for her safety," he added carelessly.

The man left them and galloped back to the road.

"Who is the abbess?" asked William of his brother. "Have you seen her?"

"No, only a cloud of women and servants on mules in the distance, all

chattering with fright. I think the abbess is some great lady on a visit to a noble kinswoman."

The Prince was returning to the camp when Louis galloped up, begging him to see the nuns go by.

"Let us salute them," he said, "and show them that heretics are not boors."

The three brothers rode back to the road, skirting the hawthorn copse, and reined up under a delicate group of young beech trees.

A little dust, a little chatter and trampling, jingle and clatter of harness, and the cavalcade came into view, preceded by the stout French man-at-arms and a number of armed men-servants.

Directly behind them and riding in front of a group of nuns came the abbess.

She was mounted on a fine white palfrey, her habit was largely white though she wore a black cloak; doeskin gloves covered her hands, and she guided the horse with glittering scarlet reins.

On her breast sparkled a large gold cross, and a rosary of carved gold beads hung at her waist cord.

She sat very upright, in no way hampered by the full robes which concealed her figure and fell over the horse almost to the ground.

Her attention was instantly attracted by the three young men under the trees; she raised her hand for the procession to halt, and said in a very sure clear voice--

"Is one of these gentlemen the Prince of Orange?"

As she named the great heretic the nuns shuddered and murmured; the men, though they halted obediently, frowned. William came forward a pace from his brothers; his slight figure, partially armed in steel, sat motionless on his grey horse; he was bare-headed, and his hair blew across his forehead; every line of his dark tired face was clear in the unshaded sunlight.

"I am he, Madame," he answered, and he looked at her curiously.

The abbess returned his gaze steadily; there was in her look the same serene steadiness as had sounded in her voice.

She was very young, little more than a child, though the white framing her face, the demure nun's robe, gave her an air of gravity; her face was pale and delicate, the features irregular and attractive, the mouth sweet, the eyes large, dark, beautiful, and wistful.

There was wistfulness in her tone when she spoke again.

"I have heard so much of Monseigneur, even in our convent. I thank Monseigneur for his courtesy in allowing our passage."

When she spoke thus, gravely in her pretty French, she was exquisitely charming, like a child masking in an elder's gown, so little did she seem to suit her habit.

"We are but soldiers of fortune, Madame," returned the Prince; "it is not for you to thank me--this is your country."

An elderly nun rode up to the young abbess and quickly whispered to her that it was indecorous to hold converse with the champion of the heretics and one going to join the rebels against the King.

The abbess listened without a blush, then again turned her serene steady gaze on the Prince.

"I am Charlotte de Bourbon, daughter of the Duke de Montmorency, and Abbess of Joiarrs," she said, "so you will understand, Monseigneur, why I cannot longer speak with you."

William understood; the Duke de Montmorency was one of the hottest Catholic nobles and one of the chiefs of the party against which Condé was struggling.

"I have been an abbess since I was twelve," continued the nun, "and know very little of the world—but I may say, God keep you, and have no stain on my conscience."

Without waiting for an answer she touched up her horse and passed on, the little train of nuns rapidly following.

The Prince was almost startled by the earnestness of the abbess's last words, which seemed full of vivid meaning.

"Had she not been a nun and Montmorency's daughter," he said, "I should have thought she blessed us."

"It is a sweet woman," remarked Louis, "that they have stifled in that habit."

The Prince watched the nuns go their way until the turn of the winding road had hidden them, then went back to the camp, to go his way of exile and ruin and loneliness.

He pulled at the hawthorn boughs as he passed, and thought of Anne of Saxony.

"I certainly am not fortunate," he remarked, with a sudden smile.

"There is the future," said Louis hopefully.

"Ah yes," answered the Prince. "The future and the past--in both there is encouragement, though the present be sad. Our task is clear before us and we are young."

"And if we die young, God will be pitiful," said Henry gravely, "and forgive us our sins because we were not wise."

Louis thought of Adolphus and of the inscription on the blood-sprinkled banner that had wrapped him, "*Nunc aut nunquam, recuperare aut mori.*"

William too had recalled his dead brother when Henry spoke. He believed that the coming years held the same fate for all of them, that neither they nor any who followed them would escape the end which befell those who defied Philip--the end which had already overtaken so many besides the young Nassau.

But though the Prince of Orange was one who loved life, he was neither regretful nor afraid.

THE END

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