GOD AND THE KING

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GOD AND THE KING

BY

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'LUCTOR ET EMERGO

MOTTO OF ZEELAND

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DEDICATED
VERY GRATEFULLY
TO
MAJOR-GENERAL F. DE BAS
DIRECTOR OF THE MILITARY HISTORICAL BRANCH
GENERAL STAFF OF THE DUTCH ARMY

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PART I
THE REVOLUTION

"Un prince profond dans ses vues; habile à former des ligues et à reunir les esprits; plus heureux à exciter les guerres qu'à combattre; plus à craindre encore dans le secret du cabinet, qu'à la tête des armées; un ennemi que la haine du nom Français avoit rendu capable d'imaginer de grandes chose et de les exécuter; un de ces génies qui semblent être nes pour mouvoir à leur gré les peuples et les souverains—un grand homme...."—MASSILLON, *Oraison Funèbre de M. le Dauthin.*

CHAPTER I
THE AFTERNOON OF JUNE 30th, 1688

"There is no managing an unreasonable people. By Heaven, my lord, they do not deserve my care."

The speaker was standing by an open window that looked on to one of the courts of Whitehall Palace, listening to the unusual and tumultuous noises that filled the sweet summer air—noises of bells, of shouting, the crack of fireworks, and the report of joyous mock artillery.

It was late afternoon, and the small apartment was already left by the departing daylight and obscured with a dusky shade, but no candles were lit.

There was one other person in the room, a gentleman seated opposite the window at a tall black cabinet decorated with gold lacquer Chinese figures, that showed vivid even in the twilight. He was watching his companion with a gentle expression of judgment, and twirling in his slim fingers a half-blown white rose.

An over-richness of furniture, hangings, and appointments distinguished the chamber, which was little more than a cabinet. The flush of rich hues in the Mortlake tapestries, the gold on the China bureau, the marble, gilt, and carving about the mantel, two fine and worldly Italian paintings and crystal sconces, set in silver, combined to give the place an overpowering air of lavishness; noticeable in one corner was a large ebony and enamel crucifix.

The persons of these two gentlemen were in keeping with this air of wealth, both being dressed in an opulent style, but in themselves they differed entirely from each other.

Neither was young, and both would have been conspicuous in any company for extreme handsomeness, but there was no further likeness.

He at the window was by many years the older, and past the prime of life, but the magnificence of his appearance created no impression of age.

Unusually tall, finely made and graceful, he carried himself with great dignity; his countenance, which had been of the purest type of aristocratic beauty, was now lined and marred—not so much by years, as by a certain gloom and sourness that had become his permanent expression; his eyes were large, grey, and commanding, his mouth noble, but disfigured by a sneer, his complexion blond and pale, his nose delicately formed and straight; a fair peruke shaded his face and hung on to his shoulders; he was dressed, splendidly but carelessly, in deep blue satins, a quantity of heavy Venice lace, and a great sword belt of embroidered leather.

The other gentleman was still in the prime of life, being under fifty, and looking less than his age.

Slight in build, above the medium height, and justly proportioned, handsome and refined in feature, dressed with great richness in the utmost extreme of fashion, he appeared the very type of a noble idle courtier, but in his long, straight, heavy-lidded eyes, thin sensitive mouth, and the deeply cut curve of his nostril was an expression of power and intelligence above that of a mere favourite of courts.

He wore his own fair hair frizzed and curled out on to his shoulders and brought very low on to his forehead; under his chin was a knot of black satin that accentuated the pale delicacy of his complexion; every detail of his attire showed the same regard to his appearance and the mode. Had it not been for that unconscious look of mastery in the calm face he would have seemed no more than a wealthy man of fashion. In his beautifully formed and white hands he held, as well as the rose, a handkerchief that he now and then pressed to his lips; in great contrast to the other man, who appeared self-absorbed and natural, his movements and his pose were extremely affected.

A pause of silence wore out; the man at the window beat his fingers impatiently on the high walnut back of the chair beside him, then suddenly turned a frowning face towards the darkening room.

"My lord, what doth this presage?"

He asked the question heavily and as if he had much confidence and trust in the man to whom he spoke.

My lord answered instantly, in a voice as artificial as the fastidious appointments of his dress.

"Nothing that Your Majesty's wisdom and the devotion of your servants cannot control and dispel."

James Stewart turned his eyes again to the open casement.

"Do you take it so lightly, my lord?" he asked uneasily. "All London shout-

ing for these disloyal prelates—the city against me?"

Lord Sunderland replied, his peculiarly soothing tones lowered to a kind of caressing gentleness, while he kept his eyes fixed on the King.

"Not the city, sir. Your Majesty heareth but the mobile—the handful that will always rejoice at a set given to authority. The people love Your Majesty and applaud your measures."

"But I am not popular as my brother was," said the King, but half satisfied, and with an angry look towards London.

The Earl was ready with his softly worded reassurances.

"His late Majesty never put his popularity to the test—I think he could not have done what you have, sir—is not the true Faith"—here my lord crossed himself—"predominant in England—hath Your Majesty any Protestant left in office—have you not an Ambassador at the Vatican, is not a holy Jesuit father on the Council board, Mass heard publicly in Whitehall—the papal Nuncio openly received?—and hath not Your Majesty done these great things in three short years?"

A glow overspread the King's sombre face; he muttered a few words of a Latin prayer, and bent his head.

"I have done a little," he said—"a little——"

Sunderland lowered his eyes.

"Seeing this is a Protestant nation, Your Majesty hath done a deal."

The King was silent a moment, then spoke, gloomy again.

"But, save yourself, my lord, and Dover and Salisbury, no person of consequence hath come into the pale of the Church—and how hath my Declaration of Indulgence been received? Discontent, disobedience from the clergy, insolence from the Bishops, and now this,—near to rebellion!" His eyes darkened. "Could you have heard the army on Hounslow Heath, my lord—they shouted as one man to hear these traitors had been acquitted."

He began to stride up and down the room, talking sternly, half to himself, half to Sunderland, the speech of an angry, obstinate man.

"But I'll not give way. Who is this Jack Somers who defended them? Make a note of him—some Whig cur! The Dissenters too, what is the Anglican Church to them that they must stand by her? Do I not offer them also freedom of conscience? Do not they also benefit by the repeal of the Test Act?"

Sunderland made no remark; he sat with his hand over the lower part of his face. By the expression of his eyes it might seem that he was smiling; but the light was fading, and James did not look at his minister.

"I'll break the Colleges too. Let them look to it. I'll go on. Am I not strong enough? They are rebels at Oxford—I'll take no rebellion—that was my father's fault; he was not strong enough at first—it must be put down now—now, eh, my

Lord Sunderland?"

He stopped abruptly before the Earl, who rose with an air of humility.

"It is my poor opinion, oft repeated, that Your Majesty must stop for nothing, but take these grumblers with a firm hand and crush them."

This counsel, though not new, seemed to please the King.

"You have ever given me good advice, my lord." He paused, then added, "Father Petre is always speaking against you, but I do not listen—no, I do not listen."

"It is my misfortune to be unpopular with the Catholics, though I have done what might be for their service."

"I do not listen," repeated the King hastily; he seated himself in the carved chair beside the bureau. "But I must tell you one thing," he added, after an instant. "M. Barillon thinketh I go too far."

Sunderland remained standing.

"He hath told me so," he answered quietly.

"What doth he mean?" asked James eagerly, and with the air of depending entirely on the other's interpretation.

"This," replied the Earl suavely—"that, good friend as His Christian Majesty is to you, it doth not suit his pride that you, sir, should grow great without his help—he would rather have Your Majesty the slave than the master of the people, rather have you dependent on him than a free ally."

"I'll not be dictated to," said the King. "My brother was too much the creature of Louis, but I will not have him meddle in my affairs."

"M. Barillon doth his duty to his master," answered the Earl. "Your Majesty need pay no attention to his warnings——"

"Warnings!" echoed the King, with sullen fire. "I take no warnings from an Ambassador of France." Then he sat forward and added in a quick, half-baffled fashion, "Yet there are dangers——"

"What dangers, sire?"

"The people are so stubborn——"

"They complain but they bow, sire; and soon they will not even complain."

"Then M. Barillon mentioned——" The King paused abruptly.

"What, sire?"

"My nephew, William."

As he spoke James glanced quickly at Sunderland, who returned the gaze calmly and mildly.

"My nephew, William—what is he plotting?"

"Plotting, Your Majesty?"

"He hath never been friendly to me," broke out the King fiercely. "Why did he refuse his consent to the Indulgence?—he who hath always stood for tolera-

tion?"

"As the head of the Protestant interest in Europe he could do no less, sire."

"He hath suborned my daughter," continued the King, in the same tone. "Seduced her from her duty—but now"—he crossed himself—"God be thanked, I have an heir. I do not need to so consider these Calvinists"—he gave the word an accent of bitter dislike—"yet I doubt he meaneth mischief——"

"I do not think so, sire. His hands are so full in keeping his own country afloat he can scarce have the time to meddle——"

The King interrupted.

"He *doth* meddle—his design is to drag me into a war with France—I doubt he hath more intrigues afoot in England than we wot of, my lord. Did M. de Zuylestein come wholly to congratulate us on the birth of the Prince? He is over often closeted with the Whig lords—and so was Dyckfelt—a knowing man."

Sunderland answered frankly.

"His Highness must have an interest in the kingdom of which his wife was till so lately the heiress, and I doubt not that he would try to foster discontents among the opposition, since he can hardly like the present policy of Your Majesty, having all his life been under the endeavour of persuading England to join his coalition against France—but he hath not the power (nor, I think, the will) to disturb Your Majesty."

James smiled reflectively.

"I believe he hath his hands full," he admitted. "He is not so steady in the states." His smile deepened as he thought on the critical situation of his son-in-law, then vexation conquered, and he added sharply, "M. Barillon said he but waited a chance to openly interfere—he would not send the English regiments back, which looked ill, and he is very friendly with Mr. Sidney——"

The King paused.

"Mr. Sidney is your uncle, my lord," he added, after a little, "and a close friend of the Prince of Orange—I was warned of that."

"By M. de Barillon?" asked Sunderland gently.

"Yes, my lord. But I took no heed of it—yet is it true that my Lady Sunderland wrote often to Mr. Sidney when he was at The Hague, and that you were privy to it?"

"There was some little exchange of gallantries, sire, no more. My lady is close friends with Mr. Sidney, and would commission him for horses, plants, candles, and such things as can be bought with advantage at The Hague."

"And did she write to the Lady Mary?"

Sunderland smiled.

"She had that honour once—the subject was a recipe for treacle water."

"Well, well," said the King, in a relieved tone of half apology, "I am so hedged

about I begin to distrust my best servants. I must be short with M. Barillon; he maketh too much of my friendship with His Majesty."

"That is the jealousy of France, sire, that ever desireth a hand in your affairs."

James answered testily.

"Let them take care. M. Barillon said my envoys abroad had sent me warning of what my nephew designed—that is not true, my lord?"

"I have received no such letters, sire, and Your Majesty's foreign correspondence toucheth no hands but mine."

The King rose and struck the bell on the black lacquer cabinet; his exceedingly ill-humour was beginning, as always, to be softened by the influence of Lord Sunderland, who had more command over him than even the Jesuit, Father Petre, who was commonly supposed to be his most intimate counsellor.

When the summons was answered the King called for candles, and went over to the window again.

The dusk was stained with the glow of a hundred bonfires, lit by good Protestants in honour of the acquittal of the seven bishops charged with treason for offering His Majesty a petition against the reading of the Declaration of Indulgence from the pulpits of the Anglican churches; the verdict and the demonstration were alike hateful to the King, and he could scarce restrain his furious chagrin as he saw the triumphant rockets leap into the deep azure sky.

He thought bitterly of the murmuring army on Hounslow Heath; had they been steadfastly loyal he would hardly have restrained from setting them on to the defiant capital which they had been gathered together to overawe.

The candles were brought, and lit the rich little chamber with a ruddy light that showed the glitter of glass and gilt, lacquer and silver, the moody face of the King, and the calm countenance of his minister.

"My nephew would never dare," muttered His Majesty at last, "nor would Mary be so forgetful of her duty——" He turned into the room again. "I think you are right, my lord; he hath too much to do at home. But I am glad I did recall Mr. Sidney—a Republican at heart—who is like his brother."

"Of what designs doth Your Majesty suspect the Prince?" asked Sunderland quietly.

The King answered hastily.

"Nothing—nothing."

"Doth M. de Barillon," asked the Earl, "think His Highness might do what Monmouth did?"

At this mention of that other unhappy nephew of his who had paid for his brief rebellion on Tower Hill, the King's face cleared of its look of doubt.

"If he tried," he answered sombrely, "he would meet with the same

reception—by Heaven, he would! No gentleman joined Monmouth, none would join the Prince."

"'Tis certain," said Sunderland. "But what causeth Your Majesty to imagine His Highness would attempt so wild a design as an armed descent on England?"

"He buildeth a great navy," remarked James.

"To protect the States against France. Reason showeth that the suggestion of His Highness' conduct that M. de Barillon hath made is folly. The Prince is the servant of the States; even if he wished, he could not use their forces to further his private ends, and is not the Princess daughter to Your Majesty, and would she help in an act of rebellion against you?"

"No," replied the King, "no—I do not think it. If the Dutch do choose to build a few ships am I to be stopped? My Lord Halifax," he added, with eagerness, "advised the giving back of the city charters and the reinstatement of the Fellows of Magdalen—but I will not—I'll break 'em, all the disloyal lot of 'em."

A slight smile curved my lord's fine lips.

"Halifax is ever for timorous counsels."

"A moderate man!" cried James. "I dislike your moderate men—they've damned many a cause and never made one. I'll have none of their sober politics."

"The best Your Majesty can do," said Sunderland, "is to gain the Dissenters, call a packed parliament of them and the Catholics in the autumn, pass the repeal of the Test Act, treat French interference firmly, strengthen the army, and bring the Irish to overawe London. There will be no murmurs against your authority this time a year hence."

James gave my lord a pleased glance.

"Your views suit with mine," he replied. "I'll officer the army with Catholics—and look to those two judges who favoured these bishops. We will remove them from the bench."

He was still alternating between ill-humour at the open display of feeling on the occasion of the public cross he had received in the matter of the bishops and the satisfaction my lord's wholly congenial counsel gave his obstinate self-confidence. A certain faith in himself and in the office he held, a still greater trust in the religion to which he was so blindly devoted, a tyrannical belief in firm measures and in the innate loyalty of church and people made this son of Charles I, sitting in the very palace from which his father had stepped on to the scaffold at the command of a plain gentleman from Hampshire, revolve schemes for the subjugation of England more daring than Plantagenet, Tudor, and Stewart had ventured on yet; he desired openly and violently to put England into the somewhat reluctant hands of the Pope, and beside this desire every other consideration was as nothing to His Majesty.

"Let 'em shout," he said. "I can afford it." And he thought of his young heir,

whose birth secured the Romish succession in England; an event that took the sting even from the acquittal of the stubborn bishops.

”Your Majesty is indeed a great and happy Prince,” remarked my lord, with that softness that gave his compliments the value of sincere meaning.

The King went up to him, smiled at him in his heavy way, and touched him affectionately on the shoulder.

”Well, well,” he answered, ”you give good advice, and I thank you, my lord.”

He fell into silence again, and the Earl took graceful leave, left the cabinet gently, and gently closed the door.

When outside in the corridor he paused like one considering, then went lightly down the wide stairs.

In the gallery to which he came at the end of the first flight was a group of splendid gentlemen talking together; my lord would have passed them, but one came forward and stopped him; he raised his eyes; it was M. Barillon.

”You have come from His Majesty?”

”Yes, sir,” answered the Earl.

”I do hope you did impress on him the need for a great caution,” said M. Barillon quickly, and in a lowered voice, ”The temper of the people hath been very clearly shown to-day.”

”I did my utmost,” said my lord ardently. ”Advised him to make concessions, warned him that the Prince was dangerous, but his obstinate temper would have none of it——”

M. Barillon frowned.

”I hope you were earnest with him, my lord; there is no man hath your influence——”

My lord’s long eyes looked steadily into the Frenchman’s face.

”Sir,” he said, ”you must be aware that I have every reason to urge His Majesty caution, since there is none as deep in his most disliked measures than myself, and if the Whigs were to get the upper hand”—he shrugged gracefully—”you know that there would be no mercy for me.”

The French Ambassador answered hastily—

”Not for an instant do I doubt your lordship. Faith, I know His Christian Majesty hath no such friend as yourself in England—but I would impress on you the danger—things reach a crisis, my lord.”

He bowed and returned to his companions, while the Earl passed through the galleries of Whitehall, filled with courtiers, newsmongers, place seekers, and politicians, and came out into the courtyard where his chair waited.

While his servant was fetching the sedan my lord put on his laced hat and lingered on the step.

A tall soldier was keeping the guard; my lord regarded him, smiled, and spoke.

"Fellow, who is your master?"

The man flushed, saluted, and stared awkwardly.

"Come," smiled the Earl whimsically. "Whom do you serve?"

The startled soldier answered stupidly—

"God and the King, your honour."

"Ah, very well," answered the Earl slowly; he descended the steps and took a pinch of snuff. "So do we all—it is merely a question of which God and which King."

CHAPTER II
THE EVENING OF JUNE 30th, 1688

Before entering his sedan, Lord Sunderland gently bade the chairman carry him round the back ways; that strange quantity, the People, that every statesman must use, fear, and obey, was abroad, roused and dangerous to-night, and my lord's diplomacy moved delicately among high places but never came into the street to handle the crowd; he could lead, control, cajole kings and courtiers, deal with continents on paper, but he was powerless before the people, who hated him, and whom he did not trouble to understand; he was aristocrat of aristocrat.

He was now the most powerful man in the three kingdoms, and, next to Lord Jefferies, the most detested; he was the only considerable noble (the other converts, Dover and Salisbury, being mean men) who had sacrificed his religion to the bigotry of the King; many courtiers to whom all faiths were alike had rejected open apostasy, but my lord had calmly turned renegade and calmly accepted the scorn and comment cast upon his action; but he did not care to risk recognition by the People bent on celebrating a Protestant triumph.

A little before he had gone down to Westminster Hall to give that technical evidence against the bishops, without which they could not have been tried (for he was the only man who had seen Sancroft pass in to the King with the petition, and therefore the only man who could prove "publication in the county of Middlesex"), and it had taken some courage to face the storm that had greeted the King's witness.

My lord did not wish for another such reception, and as he proceeded down

the quiet dark streets he looked continuously from the window of his chair in anticipation of some noisy band of Londoners who would challenge his appearance.

And that pale gentleman who peered out on to the bonfire-lit night had soon been dragged from the shadow of the satin-lined sedan and flung down into the gutter and trampled on and murdered, as was Archbishop Sharp by the Covenanters, had he been seen and recognized by some of the bands of youths and men who marched the streets with straw Popes and cardboard devils to cast to the flames.

My lord remarked that in every window, even of the poorest houses, seven candles burned, the tallest in the centre for the Archbishop, the other six for his colleagues; my lord remarked the rockets that leapt above the houses and broke in stars against the deep blue; my lord heard, even as he passed through the quietest alleys, the continuous murmur of the People rejoicing, as one may in a backwater hear the muffled but unsubdued voice of the sea.

When he reached his own great mansion and stepped from the chair, he saw that his house also was illuminated, as was every window in the great square.

He went upstairs to a little room at the back, panelled in walnut and finely furnished, where a lady sat alone.

She was of the same type as my lord—blonde, graceful, worn, and beautiful—younger than he, but looking no less.

She was writing letters at a side table, and when he entered rose up instantly, with a little sigh of relief.

"'Tis so wild abroad to-night," she said.

The Earl laid down on the mantelshelf the overblown white rose he had brought from Whitehall, and looked at his wife.

"I see we also rejoice that the bishops are acquitted," he remarked.

"The candles, you mean? It had to be—all the windows had been broken else. They needed to call the soldiers out to protect the Chapel in Sardinia Street."

He seated himself at the centre table and pulled from his pocket several opened letters that he scattered before him; his wife came and stood opposite, and they looked at each other intently across the candles.

"What doth it mean?" she asked.

"That the King walketh blindly on to ruin," he answered concisely, with a wicked flashing glance over the correspondence before him.

"The People will not take much more?"

"No."

"Well," said Lady Sunderland restlessly, "we are safe enough."

He was turning over the papers, and now lowered his eyes to them.

"Some of your letters to my Uncle Sidney have been opened," he remarked. "This is M. Barillon his work—the King taxed me to-day with being privy to the

intrigue."

"I have thought lately that we were suspected," she answered quickly. "Is this—serious?"

"No; I can do anything with the King, and he is bigot, blind, and credulous to a monstrous degree."

"Even after to-day!" exclaimed my lady.

"He believeth the nation will never turn against him," said the Earl quietly. "He thinketh himself secure in his heir—and in the Tories."

"Not half the people will allow the child is the Queen's, though," she answered. "Even the Princess Anne maketh a jest of it with her women, and saith His Highness was smuggled into Whitehall in a warming-pan by a Jesuit father——"

"So you have also heard that news?"

"Who could help it? 'Tis common talk that 'tis but a device of the King to close the succession to the Princess Mary. And though you and I, my lord, know differently, this tale is as good as another to lead the mobile."

The Earl was slowly burning the letters before him by holding them in the flame of the wax-light of a taper-holder, and when they were curled away casting them on the floor and putting his red heel on them.

"What are these?" asked the Countess, watching him.

"Part of His Majesty's foreign correspondence, my dear, warning him to have an eye to His Highness the Stadtholder."

She laughed, half nervously.

"It seemeth as if you cut away the ladder on which you stood," she said. "If the King should suspect too soon—or the Prince fail you——"

"I take the risks," said Sunderland. "I have been taking risks all my life."

"But never one so large as this, my lord."

He had burnt the last letter and extinguished the taper; he raised his face, and for all his fine dressing and careful curls he looked haggard and anxious; the gravity of his expression overcame the impression of foppery in his appearance; it was a serious man, and a man with everything at stake on a doubtful issue, who held out his hand to his wife.

She put her fingers into his palm and stood leaning against the tall back of his chair, looking down on him with those languishing eyes that had been so praised at the court of the late King, now a little marred and worn, but still brightly tender, and to my lord as lovely as when Lely had painted her beautiful among the beautiful.

"You must help me," he said, his court drawl gone, his voice sincere.

"Robert," smiled my lady, "I have been helping you ever since I met you."

"'Tis admitted," he answered; "but, sweetheart, you must help me again."

She touched lightly his thin, powdered cheek with her free hand; her smile was lovely in its tenderness.

”What is your difficulty?”

Subtle, intricate and oblique as his politics always were, crafty and cunning as were his character and his actions, with this one person whom he trusted Sunderland was succinct and direct.

”The difficulty is the Princess Mary,” he answered.

”Explain,” she smiled.

He raised his hand and let it fall.

”You understand already. Saying this child, this Prince of Wales, will never reign—the Princess is the heiress, and not her husband, and after her is the Princess Anne. Now it is not my design to put a woman on the throne, nor the design of England—we want the Prince, and he is third in succession——”

”But he can act for his wife——”

”His wife—there is the point. Will she, when she understandeth clearly what is afoot, support her husband, her father, or herself?”

The Countess was silent a little, then said—

”She hath no reason to love her father; he hath never sent her as much as a present since she went to The Hague, nor shown any manner of love for her.”

”Yet he counteth on her loyalty as a positive thing—and hath she any cause to love her husband either?”

Lady Sunderland’s smile deepened.

”Ladies will love their husbands whether they have cause or no.”

The Earl looked gently cynical.

”She was a child when she was married, and the match was known to be hateful to her; she is still very young, and a Stewart. Do you not think she is like to be ambitious?”

”How can I tell? Doth it make so much difference?”

He answered earnestly—

”A great difference. If there is a schism between her and the Prince his hands are hopelessly weakened, for there would be a larger party for her pretensions than for his——”

”What do you want me to do, dear heart?”

”I want a woman to manage a woman,” smiled the Earl. ”The Princess is seldom in touch with diplomats, and when she is—either by design or simplicity—she is very reserved.”

”She is no confidante of mine,” answered the Countess. ”I only remember her as a lively child who wept two days to leave England, and that was ten years ago.”

”Still,” urged my lord, ”you can find some engine to do me this great

service—to discover the mind of the Princess."

Lady Sunderland paused thoughtfully.

"Do you remember Basilea Gage?" she asked at length.

"One of the maids of honour to Her Majesty when she was Duchess?"

"Yes; since married to a Frenchman who died, and now in Amsterdam—she and the Princess Royal were children together—I knew her too. Should I set her on this business?"

"Would she be apt and willing?"

"She is idle, clever, and serious—but, my dear lord, a Romanist."

The Earl laughed at his wife, who laughed back.

"Very well," he said. "I think she will be a proper person for this matter."

He put the long tips of his fingers together and reflected; he loved, of all things, oblique and crooked methods of working his difficult and secret intrigues.

When he spoke it was with clearness and decision.

"Tell this lady (what she must know already) that the King's measures in England have forced many malcontents to look abroad to the Princess Royal, the next heir, and her husband to deliver them from an odious rule; say that His Majesty, however, is confident that his daughter would never forget her obedience, and that, if it came to a crisis between her father and her husband, she would hinder the latter from any design on England and refuse her sanction to any attempt on his part to disturb His Majesty—say this requireth confirmation, and that for the ease and peace of the government (alarmed by the late refusal of Her Highness to concur in the Declaration of Indulgence) and the reassurance of the mind of the King, it would be well that we should have private knowledge of the disposition of Her Highness, which, you must say, you trust will be for the advantage of the King and his just measures."

The Countess listened attentively; she was seated now close to her husband, a pretty-looking figure in white and lavender, half concealed in the purple satin cushions of the large chair.

"I will write by the next packet," she answered simply.

"So," smiled the Earl, "we will use the zeal of a Romanist to discover the knowledge we need for Protestant ends——"

As he spoke they were interrupted by a servant in the gorgeous liveries that bore witness, like everything else in the noble mansion, both to my lord's extravagance and my lady's good management.

"Mr. Sidney was below—would his Lordship see him?"

"Go you down to him," said the Earl, looking at his wife. "You can make my excuses."

He dismissed the servant; my lady rose.

"What am I to say?" she asked, like one waiting for a lesson to be imparted.

He patted the slim white hand that rested on the polished table near his.

"Find out all you can, Anne, but be cautious—speak of our great respect for His Highness, but make no definite promises—discover how deep they go in their commerce with him."

Again they exchanged that look of perfect understanding that was more eloquent of the feeling between them than endearments or soft speeches, and the Countess went down to the lavish withdrawing-room, as fine as the chambers in Whitehall, where Mr. Sidney, uncle of my lord (but no older) waited.

They met as long friends, and with that air of gracious compliment and pleasure in each other's company which the fact of one being a beautiful woman and the other a man of famous gallantry had always given to their intercourse; if every jot of my lady's being had not been absorbed in her husband she might have been in love with Mr. Sidney, and if Mr. Sidney had not followed a fresh face every day of the year he might have found leisure to fall in love with my lady; as it was, he was very constant to her friendship, but had not, for that, forgotten the lovely creature she was, and she knew it and was pleased; in their hearts each laughed a little at the other and the situation; but my lady had the more cause to laugh, because while Mr. Sidney always dealt ingenuously with her, she was all the while using him to further her husband's policies, and there was not a pleasant word she gave him that was not paid for in information that she turned to good account.

To-day she found him less the composed gallant than usual; he seemed roused, disturbed, excited.

"The town to-day!" he exclaimed, after their first greetings. "Here is the temper of the people plainly declared at last!"

The Countess seated herself with her back to the candles on the gilt side-table and her face towards Mr. Sidney; he took his place on the wand-bottomed stool by the empty hearth, where the great brass dogs stood glimmering.

The windows were open, admitting the pleasant, intangible sense of summer and the distant changing shouts and clamour of the crowd.

With a kindly smile Lady Sunderland surveyed Henry Sidney, who without her advantage of the softening shadows showed a countenance finely lined under the thick powder he wore; man of fashion, of pleasure, attractive, mediocre in talents, supreme in manners and tact, owning no deep feelings save hatred to the King, whose intrigues had brought his brother to the block in the last reign, and a certain private loyalty to the laws and faith of England, Henry Sidney betrayed his character in every turn of his handsome face and figure. A man good-humoured, sweet-tempered but lazy, yet sometimes, as now, to be roused to the energy and daring of better men. In person he was noticeable among a court remarkable for handsome men; he had been in youth the most famous beau of

his time, and still in middle age maintained that reputation.

His political achievements had not been distinguished. Sent as envoy to the States, he had so managed to ingratiate himself with the Prince of Orange as, in spite of the opposition of the English court, to be appointed commander of the English Regiment in the Dutch service, and the mouthpiece of His Highness to the English Whigs.

James, who had always disliked him, had recalled him from The Hague despite the protests of the Stadtholder, and he had found himself so out of favour with Whitehall as to deem it wiser to travel in Italy for a year, though he had never relaxed his correspondence either with the Prince or the great Protestant nobles who had been thrown into the opposition by the imprudent actions of the King.

He was in London now at some risk, as Lady Sunderland knew, and she waited rather curiously to hear what urgency had brought him back to the centre of intrigue.

His acceptance of her graceful excuses for the Earl was as formal as her offering of them; so long ago had it been understood that she was always the intermediary between her astute lord and the powerful Whig opposition of which Mr. Sidney was secretly so active a member.

"You and your friends will be glad of this," she said.

He looked at her a hesitating half second, then replied with an unusual sincerity in the tones generally so smooth and expressionless.

"Every Catholic who showeth his face is insulted, and a beadle hath been killed for endeavouring to defend a Romist chapel—the people are up at last."

"I know," she answered calmly. "I feared that my lord would not be safe returning from Whitehall."

"If they had seen him, by Heaven, he would not have been!" said Mr. Sidney. He spoke as if he understood the people's point of view. Lax and careless as he was himself, Sunderland's open and shameless apostasy roused in his mind some faint shadow of the universal hatred and scorn that all England poured on the renegade.

My lady read him perfectly; she smiled.

"How are you going to use this temper in the people?" she asked. "Is it to die out with the flames that consume the straw Popes, or is it to swell to something that may change the face of Europe?"

Mr. Sidney rose as if his restless mood could not endure his body to sit still.

"It may change the dynasty of England," he said.

My lady kept her great eyes fixed on him.

"You think so?" she responded softly.

His blonde face was strengthened into a look of resolve and triumph.

”The King hath gone too far.” He spoke in an abrupt manner new to him. ”No bribed electorate or packed parliament could force these measures—as we have seen to-day.” There was, as he continued, an expression in his eyes that reminded the Countess of his brother Algernon, republican and patriot. ”Is it not strange that he hath forgotten his father so soon, and his own early exile?” he said.

”His over-confidence playeth into your hands,” she answered.

He gave a soft laugh, approached her, and said, in his old caressing tones—

”Frankly, my lady—how far will the Earl go?”

”With whom?” she smiled.

”With us—the Prince of Orange and the Whigs, ay—and the honest Tories too.”

She played with the tassels of the stiff cushion behind her.

”My lord hath the greatest affection and duty for His Highness, the greatest admiration for him, the greatest hopes in him——”

”Come, Madam,” he responded, ”we are old friends—I want to know my lord his real mind.”

”I have told it you,” she said, lifting candid eyes, ”as far as even I know it——”

”You must know that His Highness hath in his desk letters from almost every lord in England, assuring him of admiration and respect—what was M. Dyckfelt over here for—and M. Zuylestein?—we want to know what the Earl will *do*.”

”What are the others—*doing*?” asked the Countess lightly.

He saw the snare, and laughed.

”My hand is always for you to read, but there are others seated at this game, and I may not disclose the cards.”

My lady lent forward.

”You cannot,” she said, in the same almost flippant tone, ”expect my lord to declare himself openly a Whig?”

”He might, though, declare himself secretly our friend.”

”Perhaps,” she admitted, then was silent.

Intimate as he was with the Countess, Mr. Sidney was not close with her lord, and felt more than a little puzzled by that statesman’s attitude. Sunderland, he knew, was in receipt of a pension, probably a handsome pension, from France; he was loathed by the Whigs and caressed by the King; as Lord President and First Secretary he held the highest position in the Kingdom; the emoluments of his offices, with what he made by selling places, titles, pardons, and dignities, were known to be enormous; his conversion to the Church of Rome had given him almost unlimited influence over James; and his great experience, real talents,

and insinuating manners made him as secure in his honours as any man could hope to be; yet through his wife he had dallied with the Whigs, written, as Sidney knew, to the Prince of Orange, and held out very distinct hopes that he would, at a crisis, help the Protestants.

Certainly he had not gone far, and it was important, almost vital, to the opposition that he should go farther, for he had it in his power to render services which no other man could; he only had the ear of James, the control of the foreign correspondence, the entire confidence of M. Barillon, and he alone was fitted to mislead the King and the Ambassador as to the schemes of their enemies, as he alone would be able to open their eyes to the full extent of the ramifications of the Protestant plots.

It was the Countess who broke the silence, and her words were what she might have chosen could she have read Mr. Sidney's thoughts.

"My lord, who is the greatest man in the kingdom, hath more to stake and lose than you Whigs who are already in disgrace with His Majesty."

"I know that very well," he answered; "but if the government fell, remember there are some who would fall with it beyond the hope of ever climbing again. One is my Lord Jefferies, another my Lord Sunderland."

She looked at him calmly.

"They are both well hated by the people," she said. "I do admit it." She leant forward in her chair. "Do you think it would be worth while for my lord to stake the great post he holdeth for the chance of safety if..."

She hesitated, and he supplied the words.

—"if there was a revolution," he said.

"Do you talk of revolutions!" she exclaimed.

His fair face flushed.

"Listen," he answered briefly.

My lady turned her delicate head towards the window. Beyond her brocade curtains lay the dark shape of London, overhung with a glow of red that stained the summer sky. She sat silent. Mr. Sidney stood close to her, and she could hear his quick breathing; he, as she, was listening to the bells, the shouting, the crack of fireworks, now louder, now fainter, but a continuous volume of sound.

"The people——" said Mr. Sidney.

"Do they make revolutions?" she asked.

"If there is a man to guide them they do——"

"Well?"

"Before, there was Cromwell."

"And now——"

"Now there is William of Orange."

My lady rose.

”His Highness,” she said quietly but firmly, ”may be assured that he hath a friend, a secret friend in my lord.”

Mr. Sidney looked anxiously into her eyes.

”May I rely on that?”

She smiled rather sadly.

”You, at least, can trust me.”

Mr. Sidney bowed over her slender hand.

”You are a sweet friend and a clever woman, but——”

Lady Sunderland interrupted him.

”I am sincere to-night. We see our dangers. You shall hear from me at The Hague.”

CHAPTER III
THE NIGHT OF JUNE 30th, 1688

Some hours after his parting with Lady Sunderland, Mr. Sidney left a modest house in Greg Street, Soho Fields, in company with a common tarpaulin, whose rough clothes were in strong contrast to the rich appointments of the notable beau he accompanied.

It was a fine night, but cloudy. The two men proceeded in silence towards Gerrard Street, the sailor with his hands in his pockets and Mr. Sidney swinging his cane.

Every house they passed had the seven candles in the windows, and the sound of bells and shouting was as persistent as it had been in the drawing-room of Sunderland House; the street was empty save for a few wandering link-boys and beggars.

As they, walking rapidly and steadily, approached St. Martin-in-the-Fields, the feeble rays of the oil-lamps over every tenth door, that only served to illuminate the signs and cast great shadows from the passers-by, were absorbed in a red glare that touched the brick fronts of the precise houses with a deep glow.

”A bonfire,” remarked Mr. Sidney.

The tarpaulin answered in the accents of a gentleman.

”A pope-burning—had we not best take another way?”

As Mr. Sidney hesitated the other added, with a laugh—

”After all, is it not a good omen? Let us see this martyrdom,” and he pressed

into the confines of the crowd gathered round an enormous bonfire, which blazed in front of the church steps.

Mr. Sidney followed, and the two found themselves absorbed into the multitude of apprentices, shopkeepers, clerks, and citizens of all descriptions, who were engaged in celebrating the acquittal of the bishops by burning His Holiness in effigy.

For awhile they were unnoticed in the general excitement, then Mr. Sidney's appearance was remarked. His plumed hat, his sword, his curling peruke, and the rich velvet mantle that concealed his person instantly told them that he was not of their class. Suspicion was roused that he was a spy of the Court, and they began to rudely jostle him; but the sailor, who kept closely beside him, laughed good-humouredly, and cried—

"Gently, my friends. We are good Protestants come to see the burning of the Devil and the Pope."

"Sure," came a quick answer, "if you were popish dogs you would scarce be here to-night!"

Sidney smiled at the eager young man who spoke.

"No," he said. "Long live the King, the Church, and the Laws—eh, my friend?"

"I do not know so much about the first—but all my heart the second and third!"

The sailor looked sharply at the speaker, who was a youth of two- or three-and-twenty, very plainly dressed, almost shabby, with a keen, dark face, intelligent, ardent eyes, and a quantity of untidy curly hair. He seemed to be a student or clerk, and was obviously the leading spirit of a band of youths of his own age, who were making most of the noise and clamour.

He in his turn closely scrutinized the sailor, then said, in abrupt tones of friendliness—

"I'll get you through. You and the gentleman get behind me, and I'll make 'em give away——"

With the quick energy that seemed his characteristic he shouldered his way through the press and forced a passage for Mr. Sidney and the sailor, bringing them to the steps of the church, where they had a good view over the crowd, and stood directly behind the bonfire.

He paused, a little breathless with fighting through the throng, and with blows given and taken, and asked Mr. Sidney, whose splendour seemed to somewhat overawe him, if he had ever seen a pope-burning before.

"Never," smiled that gentleman; but the sailor added instantly—

"I have, many a time; 'tis the finest fun in the world."

The young man looked at him with the sharp suspicious curiosity of youth.

He was quick to notice the difference between speech and dress, and his instant's glance further confused him. The strong light of the bonfire showed a resolute-looking man, dressed in the coarse worn clothes of a common sailor, but unmistakeably a gentleman. He seemed amused and interested. A pleasant smile lit his face, and his grey eyes were bright and self-contained.

"You were like to be clapt up if the watch caught you at this," he said.

The youth was gloriously scornful.

"The watch! Do you think we would disperse for a regiment?"

"Look out for the regiments then," smiled the sailor. "There are sixteen thousand men on Hounslow Heath."

"How many of 'em would take arms against the city?" was the instant retort. "They too are good Protestants."

"I perceive that you are something of a Politic," said Mr. Sidney; and then all further remark was cut short by the arrival of the procession carrying the Pope, at sight of which an almost solemn hush fell on the crowd, who stopped supplying the bonfire with squibs, oil, and tar, and drew back in close ranks before the steps of the church.

The Pope was a huge figure of straw with a wax face, carried in a chair on the shoulders of four men. He was clothed in an expensive scarlet silk robe, and wore on his head a tiara of painted pasteboard, decorated with sparkling glass; his scornful and saturnine face, which, if meant for the reigning pontiff, was a cruel libel on the most honourable and simple of men, was turned a little to one side in the action of listening to a huge black-horned Devil who was busily whispering in his ear, one stiff hand was raised with two fingers lifted in blessing, and the other (both formed of white gloves stuffed, with glass beads on the backs) hung limply by his side.

The young man who had befriended Mr. Sidney and his friend gave some kind of a whistling signal, upon which the greater number of the crowd broke into verses of a doggerel song against popery and the bishops. As each sang different words and tune the result was a mere lusty din, in which not a syllable was distinguishable; nevertheless the hundred voices of hate, derision, scorn, and triumph addressing the dumb grotesque image of a loathed religion had an impressive significance and contained a deep warning.

For these were not isolated nor feeble voices—the will and purpose of a great nation echoed in them—nor were they the voices of mere fanaticism, but the cries of protest raised by a jealous people whose liberties had been struck at and broken.

In the faces the leaping flames brought into relief against the surrounding darkness might be traced that fearless English spirit that would not for long own a master; in the coarse jeers, hoots, and hisses might be discerned that devotion

to the reformed faith that had united Anglican and Dissenter (despite the high bid the King had made for the favour of the latter), in stern and unyielding opposition to the Romanist worship that was in vain being forced on them.

Mr. Sidney wondered if James could see these faces and hear these voices it would give him pause; if even his hard bigotry would not learn something of the temper of a strong people roused. It seemed incredible that if the King could see these people now that he could forget Cromwell and his own exiled youth.

The dummy Pope was lowered from his seat of mock triumph and pitched forward into the centre of the flames, the Devil clinging to him, at which a savage roar rose as if real flesh and blood had been sacrificed to appease fierce passions.

Mr. Sidney a little drew back against the flame-flushed pillars behind him. As the spreading fire scorched his face so the temper of the crowd put a kind of awe into his heart.

"Who is to manage these?" he murmured. He was no statesman. Then he pulled his companion by the sleeve. "There was a man killed to-day—let us get on——"

But the sailor, with his arms folded across his breast, was watching the bonfire, in the heart of which the Pope appeared to be writhing as he shrivelled, while his wax face ran into one great tear, his tiara shrunk and disappeared, and the Devil, a black patch in the redness, emitted horrid fumes of sulphur as he was consumed.

"'Tis a pretty show," he said briefly.

"But one not pleasing to the King's Majesty, do you think?" flashed the dark youth who had been their guide.

"No," smiled the other. "I think it would grieve His Majesty even more than the acquittal of the holy fathers——"

The young man laughed; he seemed very excited.

"See you, sir, if you wait awhile you will see a warming-pan burnt—with the pretended Prince of Wales, that Popish brat, within!"

Mr. Sidney interrupted.

"We have a boat to catch at Gravesend, if you could make a passage for us, my friend——"

More than a little flattered at being thus addressed by so fine a gentleman, the youth, by various shouted commands to his companions, elbowings and blows administered in a lively manner, steered Mr. Sidney and the sailor out of the crowd with the same dexterity that he had guided them to the church steps.

On the confines of the press, Mr. Sidney, rather breathless, shook out his mantle and adjusted his hat. The glow from the bonfire cast their shadows long and leaping over the grass. In the distance towards the archery fields and the

Mall were other crowds and processions to be seen passing in and out of the trees, and another bonfire was burning in front of the mansion of the Protestant Northumberlands. The air was full of the harsh colour of artificial light, the smell of powder and tar, of burning rag and oil, belching smoke and the crack of squib, rocket and bomb, mingled with noisy shouting of anti-Popish songs and hoarse cheers for the bishops, the Dissenters, and the Protestant succession.

"This must be pleasant music at Whitehall," remarked the sailor, with good-humoured indifference. He was standing now full in the light of the lantern at the corner of the church, and the young man, who had been looking at him with great eagerness, exclaimed softly—

"It is Admiral Herbert!"

He turned instantly.

"My name is not for public hearing to-night," he said quickly. "And, God of Heaven, boy, how did you know me?"

The young man flushed.

"You used to come to the 'Rose' in Charing Cross—near here, you remember? My uncle kept it——"

Arthur Herbert smiled.

"Yes—I remember; and who are you?"

"A scholar at St. John's now," answered the youth, in the same eager, excited way; "that is thanks to my Lord Dorset——"

"Why, I recall," said Mr. Sidney; "'tis my lord's last genius, sure—he who wrote a satire against the court last year with one Charley Montague—a parody on Mr. Dryden's bombast, which sorely vexed him——"

"The same, sir," answered the young man, flushing deeper with pleasure. "Lord Dorset is the Mæcenas of the age, as I have truly found——"

"Well," said the Admiral, "you seem a likely spark—stick to your Pope-burning and you'll find yourself at Court yet—that is good advice. What is your name? I don't read poetry."

"I don't write it, sir," retorted the other, with an engaging touch of impudence. "Only verses—a little satire and a little truth."

Arthur Herbert laughed.

"Well, what is your name?"

"Prior, sir—Matthew Prior."

"Good evening, Mr. Prior, and remember that you did not see me to-night—silence, mind, even to your friends the Whigs."

"I know enough for that, sir," responded the student simply. He took off a battered hat with a courtly air of respect, and discreetly turned away and slipped back into the crowd.

The two gentlemen continued their way.

”We run some risk, you observe,” smiled Mr. Sidney. ”Who would have reckoned on that chance?”

”None but good Protestants are abroad to-night,” answered the Admiral; ”but I doubt if you will be safe in London much longer——”

”I will come to The Hague as soon as I dare—tell His Highness so much; but I would not have my going prejudice those who must remain at their posts—it would give a colour to rumours if I was to return to The Hague——”

”My Lord Sunderland manageth the rumours,” smiled Herbert.

”My Lord Sunderland,” repeated Mr. Sidney reflectively, ”is difficult stuff to handle. I tell you plainly that I do not know how far he will go.”

”But he will not betray us?”

”No—I can go warrant for that.”

They turned down the Strand and walked along the river, which was lively with water-men and boats of music and great barges.

”M. Zuylestein will be sending Edward Russell with further news,” said Mr. Sidney. ”Look out for him, I pray you, at The Hague.”

”Edward Russell must be weary of running to and fro England and Holland,” remarked Herbert. ”And how long will the King allow M. Zuylestein to drill parties against him?”

Mr. Sidney answered shortly.

”Mr. Russell hath my reason of hatred to the house of Stewart, and as for M. Zuylestein he is too clever to give His Majesty a chance to interfere.”

They paused at one of the landing stages, and Herbert shouted to an idle pair of oars that was looking for custom.

”Now, farewell,” he said, ”lest you shame my appearance—I shall be at Gravesend to-night and, given fair wind, at Maaslandsluys in a day.” He pressed Mr. Sidney’s hand, smiled, and hastened down the steps.

With a sobbing swish of water the boat drew up; the oars clanked in the rowlocks. Mr. Sidney watched the tall figure in the red breeches of the sailor step in, look back and wave his hand; then the boat joined the others that covered the dark river, and was soon lost to sight in the cross glimmers of lanterns and half-seen shapes.

Mr. Sidney remained gazing down the Thames—behind him the great capital rejoicing with their bells and rockets and bonfires, their shouting and singing, behind him the luxurious palace where the King must be enduring a sharp humiliation. Mr. Sidney smiled; he thought with a keenness rare in his soft nature of his brother who had laid down his life on Tower Hill through the intrigues of the Duke of York, now King. It astonished himself how much the memory of that injury rankled. He had not loved his brother to half the measure that he hated the man who had brought him to death. Indolent in mind and temper, he

loathed cruelty, and the blood of Algernon Sidney was not the only witness to the cruelty of James Stewart. Mr. Sidney had seen the look on the fair face of Lord Monmouth when he landed at the Tower stairs; he had seen well-born men and women, implicated only indirectly in the late rebellion, shipped off to Virginia as slaves, while the Italian Queen and her women quarrelled over the price of them; he had seen, in this short reign, many acts of an extraordinary tyranny and cruelty, and his thoughts dealt triumphantly on Mr. Herbert, slipping down the river out of the tumult and excitement to the quiet of Gravesend with an important little paper in his seaman's coat pocket.

CHAPTER IV
THE MESSENGER FROM ENGLAND

Madame de Marsac, one time Miss Basilea Gage and maid of honour to the Queen of England, sat in the window-place of an inn in The Hague and looked down into the street. There was an expression of indifference on her face and of listlessness in her attitude, though a man in black velvet was standing near to her and speaking with an appearance of great energy, and he was M. D'Avaux, minister of King Louis XIV to the States General.

Basilea was Romanist, of a family who had held that faith since the days of Queen Mary Tudor; her husband, two years dead, an officer in the French Army, had left her with a small fortune and no regrets, since she was yet undecided as to whether she had liked him or no; though too clever to be unhappy she was miserably idle, and had drifted from Paris back to London, and from London to Amsterdam, where her late lord's people were prominent among the powerful French faction, and still without finding any interest in life.

It was M. D'Avaux, with whom she had some former acquaintance, who had urgently requested her to come to The Hague, and she was here, listening to him, but without enthusiasm, being more engaged in watching the great number of well-dressed people who passed up and down the wide, clean street.

M. D'Avaux perhaps noticed her inattention, for he broke his discourse with an abrupt question.

"Would you care to see a revolution in your country—'49 over again with the Prince of Orange in place of Cromwell?"

She turned quickly, obviously startled. Though so indifferent to actual hap-

penings, she was tenacious of tradition, and she felt a vast, though passive, admiration for the action of King James in re-establishing in his kingdoms the ancient faith that was hers.

"Why—you mean——" she began, and paused, searching his face with puzzled dark eyes.

"I mean, Madame," said M. D'Avaux strongly, "that your King is cutting away the supports that prop his throne—you must know something of the feeling in England."

"Yes," she assented; "the trouble with the colleges, the declaration of Indulgence, and some rare malicious talk of the Prince of Wales—but nothing like—a revolution!"

The Frenchman smiled.

"Let me tell you some facts. When Henry Sidney was Envoy here he was in reality the channel of communication between the Opposition in England and His Highness—even since his recall he hath served the same turn—and these last months Edward Russell hath been coming and going with messages between the Prince and those great Protestants whom the King hath put out of office."

"If this is known," cried Basilea, "surely it can be prevented—it is treason!"

"What is treason in England, Madame, is loyalty at The Hague—and do you imagine that I have any influence with the States, who are entirely under the rule of the Prince?"

"I have noticed," answered Basilea, "a monstrous number of English and French Protestants at The Hague, but thought they came here for a mere refuge."

"They come here," said M. D'Avaux drily, "for revenge—since the Edict of Nantes was revoked all the Huguenots look to the Prince, and since he refused his assent to the declaration of Indulgence every Englishman who is not a Romanist looketh to him also."

Basilea rose; the sunshine was over her curls and blue dress, and shook a red light from the garnets at her wrist; her eyes narrowed; she was interested by this clear talk of important events.

"What could the Prince do?" she asked quietly.

M. D'Avaux replied with some passion.

"This is the tenth year of the uneasy peace forced on His Highness by His Majesty and the late King Charles, and not a month of that time that he hath not been working to be avenged on us for the terms we obtained then—he hath combined powers in secret leagues against us, he hath vexed and defied us at every turn, and he hath never, for one moment, ceased to intrigue for the help of England against us—in some final issue."

”But England,” said Basilea quickly, ”is entirely bound to France——”

”Yes; and because of that, and because the Prince of Orange knoweth it, King James is in a desperate strait——”

”Why?”

”Madame, I know the Prince tolerably well—he never relinquishes any idea that hath a firm hold on his mind, and what he cannot accomplish by diplomacy he will assay by force.”

”By force!” echoed Basilea, staring at the Ambassador.

He came a little nearer to her and lowered his voice.

”What is the business that keepeth Edward Russell on messenger duty to and fro The Hague and London? What is the business that keepeth the Prince for ever riding from his villa to the States? Why are all the harness makers of the Provinces making bridles, bits, and spurs? Why is the Prince, if there is not some great design afoot, buying up load after load of hay—why are new ships being built, fresh troops being raised?”

”Surely,” answered Basilea, ”I have heard it said that the States were making ready in case the dispute between King Louis and the Pope anent Cologne should involve attack on their frontiers.”

”I do not believe it,” said M. D’Avaux. ”But King James and Lord Sunderland take your view—they will not be roused, they will not see, and daily they further rouse that loyalty which is their sole support. I am well informed from England that not one man in ten believeth the Prince of Wales to be the King’s son, and that they regard the producing of him as a mere fraud to cheat the Princesses of their birthright.”

”What do you mean, what do you think?” asked Basilea. ”It is not possible that the Prince should claim his wife’s inheritance by force of arms?”

”You put it very succinctly,” said M. D’Avaux. ”That is exactly what I think he will do.”

Basilea was silent. The, to her, amazing aspect of international politics disclosed in M. D’Avaux’s brief and troubled summary filled her with dismay and anger. The domestic government of England did not concern her, since she did not live under it, and her family, being Romanist, were more prosperous under King James than they had ever been. She had not given much thought to the justice or wisdom of the means the King had taken to convert his kingdom, but she approved of the principle. She had no admiration for the Prince of Orange, and no sympathy for the cause he upheld.

”He would never,” she remarked, continuing her thoughts aloud, ”dare the scandal of an open rupture betwixt himself and His Majesty, who is both his uncle and his wife’s father——”

”There is nothing but dislike between them since the King recalled Sidney

and the Prince refused his assent to the repeal of the Test Act——"

"But the Princess," interrupted Basilea. "Why, I used to know her, and I dare assure you she is not one to forget her duty——"

"Her duty!" repeated M. D'Avaux.

He looked at her intently.

"You have touched the reason why I asked you to come to The Hague," he said. "I want you to wait on the Princess and obtain from her some assurance that she would never countenance any menace to her father——"

"I am sure she would not," answered Basilea at once.

"I do hope it, for if she will not support her husband his design is as good as hopeless, since it is her claim, not his own, he must put forward."

Basilea smiled.

"She is a Stewart, must be a little ambitious, if nothing else, and hers was not a love-match that she should sacrifice everything to her husband."

She glanced quickly at M. D'Avaux, and added—

"But you still look doubtful——"

"Madame," he replied earnestly, "the Princess is a very ardent Protestant——"

"She was not at Whitehall."

"—She hath," he continued, "lived ten years with the Prince——"

"They say in England that he doth not treat her kindly——"

"His Majesty hath done his best to put discord between them—when Her Highness discovered that her Chaplain and one of her women, Anne Trelawney, were working on His Majesty's orders to make mischief betwixt the Prince and herself, she dismissed them. I thought that looked ill for us."

Basilea shook her head, still smiling.

"An English princess will not be so soon subdued—I'll undertake to get assurances from Her Highness that she is ignorant of these tales of the designs of the Prince, and that she would never support them if she knew of them."

Basilea spoke with some animation; she felt sure of what she said, and was not ill pleased to be of service to her own and her adopted country in this, as she thought it, pleasant fashion.

She remembered Mary Stewart as a lively, laughing girl, who had detested and opposed her marriage with much spirit, and she had no fear that she would find that wilful gay Princess difficult to manage.

M. D'Avaux was not so confident.

"You do not know the Prince," he remarked, and Basilea laughed.

"He is not so redoubtable where women are concerned, I think," she answered; "at least allow me to try."

"I ask it of you," he said gravely; "for more hangs on this than I dare think."

"Sure, you need not fear the Prince," she returned, "if he had the most wicked will in the world—the difficulties in his way are unsurmountable."

"France," he replied, "must make them so."

On that he took his leave, and left Basilea with more busy thoughts than had been hers for some while since.

She returned to the window-seat, propped her chin on her palm, and looked down the street. She was a pretty seeming woman, slender, dusky brown in the hair and eyes, of a just height and proportion, and her person was shown to advantage by the plain French style of her gown and ringlets, which had a graceful simplicity wholly wanting in the stiff fashions prevailing in England and the Low Countries.

Her window looked upon an end of the Buitenhof, one of the two great squares that formed the centre of The Hague so admired by strangers; it was planted with lime trees, now past their flowering time, but still fragrant and softly green in the gentle air of July.

A great number of people of both sexes, finely dressed, were passing up and down, on foot, on horseback, and in little open chariots and sedans. Basilea noticed many unmistakeably English, Scotch, and French of varying degrees of qualities—soldiers, divines, gentlemen, and women mingling with the crowd, hastening past with intent faces or lounging with idle glances at each other in hopes to detect a friend or patron.

She opened the window and leaned out so that she could see the Buitenhof with the straight lines and arches of the government buildings of the States, the trees that shaded the great fish-pond called the Vyver, and the open square where the carriages passed on their way to the fashionable promenade of the Voorhout and Toorviveld.

Among all the varying figures that caught her glance was that of a tall man in the garb of an English seaman—red breeches, a tarred coat, a cocked hat with his captain's colours, and a heavy sword.

She noticed him first because he stopped to ask directions of two passers-by, English also, and because he was, even among so many, of a fine and showy appearance.

He turned at first towards the arches that led through to the Binnenhof and the Hall of the Knights, then hesitated, turned back, and retraced his steps until he was just under Basilea's window.

Here he paused again, and accosted a stout gentleman in the dress of an Anglican priest, who was dashing through the press with a great air of importance and hurry.

On seeing the tarpaulin he greeted him with noisy surprise and pleasure,

and drew him a little out of the crowd, and proceeded to converse eagerly with the unction of the inveterate talker.

Basilea laughed to herself as she observed the seaman's efforts to escape, and to obtain some answer to a question first.

At last he seemed to accomplish both, for he wrenched himself from the powerful presence of the priest, and hastened towards the Stadhuis, while the other called after him in a voice meant to be subdued, but still so resonant that Basilea could hear every word: "The Prince will be back to-morrow evening!"

The seaman waved his hat, nodded, and hastened on.

Basilea wondered why a common sailor should be concerned as to when His Highness returned to The Hague, and concluded, rather angrily, that here was evidence of one of the manifold intrigues which the Whigs, M. D'Avaux had assured her, carried on almost openly in Holland.

CHAPTER V
THE PRINCESS OF ORANGE

Basilea de Marsac waited on Her Highness the day after her interview with M. D'Avaux; a curious coincidence had strengthened her desire to see the Princess, and piqued her curiosity as to the sentiments of that lady. One of the fast packets that were constantly plying between the States and England had brought her a letter from Lady Sunderland, who was, to Basilea, a person who of all others must find it her interest and duty to be intensely loyal. My lady wrote a long and involved letter, but the sum of it seemed to be what M. D'Avaux had put much more plainly, namely, that the King's party (among whom was, of course, Lord Sunderland) had become alarmed at the crisis the actions of His Majesty had brought upon the country in attempting to push forward his own religion, and that they feared an active interference on the part of the Prince of Orange, now his wife's claims were indefinitely postponed by the birth of the Prince of Wales, and his hopes of an English alliance against the French for ever shattered by the policy of King James.

Lady Sunderland concluded by asking of Basilea what M. D'Avaux had asked—that she should discover the mind of the Princess, and draw some promise from her for the satisfaction of Royalist and Romanist, to the effect that Her Highness would never let her title to the English throne be a handle for her husband's

political designs.

Basilea was half roused, half amused by the double errand. She was not very well informed about politics, but she felt in her heart an absolute doubt of any revolution in England. All her life there had been talk of it, but it had always ended in a few executions or fights in Scotland, or some such vague conclusions in which she had never been very interested; but she could understand that Lady Sunderland did not feel lukewarm in the matter. Ever since the May of last year, when the Earl had been converted to the Church of Rome (a step which none other of the King's ministers had taken), he had been as detested in England as it was possible for a man to be. The King alone protected him, and if he fell, there was little doubt that his fall also would be swift and terrible.

Basilea liked the Countess; she was better pleased to serve her than to serve M. D'Avaux, and she anticipated, with pleasure, being able to write in answer that the Princess was still a Stewart, despite ten years' residence in Holland.

It was late afternoon when Basilea had her audience (accorded without difficulty) at the Prince's villa beyond The Hague, called the 'huis ten bosch' by reason of the beautiful wood and deer park in which it stood. This house had been built by the Prince's grandmother, Amalia of Solms, and contained the famous hall which she had decorated in honour of her husband, the Stadtholder Frederick Henry. There was no splendour, however, in the apartments Basilea saw; the appointments were neat and comfortable, but neither lavish nor rich, and she had known English ladies better served as to the quantity and appearance of servants than was the Princess Royal of England.

In a room at the back, that overlooked a formal garden filled with roses and box hedges, Basilea found the mistress of the quiet house and the lady whose mind two great kingdoms were anxious to know.

It was a chamber panelled in walnut, and furnished by chairs with worked seats and stools with fringed covers, several fine pieces of Eastern furniture, and many shelves on which stood curious and vivid china monsters and vases, and low pots filled with roses.

Basilea did not know which of the two young ladies seated by the window was the Princess, so utterly had ten years worked their change.

She hesitated after her courtsey, and the taller of the two ladies came forward and took her hand warmly.

"Are you Basilea Gage with whom I used to play at Twickenham?" she asked. "Why did you not come to see me sooner?"

She smiled half wistfully, and turned to her companion.

"This is Mademoiselle Dyckfelt, and this is Madame de Marsac, Anne, whom I told you was coming to-day."

She had a timid way of speaking, as if she was shy, and, to Basilea, some-

thing of the formal in her manner, as if she was preoccupied.

The Dutch lady was like most of her countrywomen whom Basilea had observed, very fair and pretty, with that glow and robust brightness that gave the women of Holland their reputation for handsomeness. She was plainly dressed in grey branched with silver, and was engaged in working a chair-cover in cross stitch. The vivid green and blue of the wools she used showed off her small, plump white hands—a common beauty among her nation.

The Princess began talking of England and the people she remembered there; while Basilea answered she observed Mary, who seemed to her disappointingly strange and indifferent.

Still little more than a girl, she was extremely beautiful, uniting her father's aristocratic grace and her mother's soft charm; though dignified and above the common height, she bore herself humbly and with a deprecating sweetness.

Basilea was not the only one who at first sight had been impressed with the air of simple purity which heightened and glorified Mary's beauty, for it was impossible to find a fault in her person or manner: she was unconscious of herself, tactful, without affectations or vanities, watchful for others, and charming in address, though with that pretty reserve that Basilea called formality.

Her features were not unlike those of her ancestress—another Mary Stewart, Queen of Scotland—soft and lovely, childlike in profile, with the gentle curve of contour; but grave and rather sad in the full look, and with the expression of a woman, and a woman who has observed, grieved, and pitied.

Her brown eyes were very large, misty, and continually narrowed from weak sight, her hair, of the Stewart red-brown, hung in thick natural curls from a simple knot in her neck.

She gained no advantage from her dress, which would not have offended a Puritan: the straight, boned bodice and stiff falling stuff of a dull pink colour held no line of grace, and the prim ruffles to wrist and throat were more decorous than becoming. At the English court her attire would have been considered ugly, if not ridiculous, and Basilea did not find it pleasing. She was not herself of a type that can afford to forego the advantages of adornment, and she reflected that with the Princess's beauty and her own taste she could have made a sumptuous appearance.

While thus inwardly admired and criticized, Mary was speaking of England and all her one-time friends there, and Mademoiselle Dyckfelt making comments in pretty broken English, accompanied with a little gasping laugh which Basilea had noticed in many Dutch people.

Through all her amiable converse Mary betrayed some slight inner agitation and expectation, as if she feared the visit might have another meaning than mere courtesy; and Basilea guessed that she, whose position was one of such

importance in Europe, must be used to oblique attempts to sound her views.

With a half-faint amusement she made her own essay—

"Highness, I was in good hopes that you would not seem such a stranger to me, because I am instructed to make the venture to speak with you——"

Mary looked at her quickly, and interrupted—

"By whom instructed?"

"Lady Sunderland, Madame, for whom your Highness was wont to have some kindness."

The Princess flushed, and Basilea wondered why, as her sole answer was—

"I think Lady Sunderland a good woman."

Basilea smiled.

"She is also, as Your Highness knoweth, a great politic, which I never was nor could be, and hath set me to ask Your Highness some questions bearing on great affairs."

"Great affairs," said Mary under her breath. She rose gravely. "I think we must not plague Mademoiselle Dyckfelt with this talk. Will you, Madame, come into the garden?"

The Dutch maiden rose and unlatched the long window, then returned placidly to her sewing.

Mary and Basilea descended a few steps into the formal garden, mainly composed of box hedges and clipt rose bushes, with a square pond in the centre bordered with little yellow yew trees in wooden tubs and precise beds of pinks and herbs.

The tall and beautiful trees of the deer park in which the villa stood rose up, with the elegant air of loftiness peculiar to the trees of a perfectly flat country where they are the highest things the eye has within range; the air also was characteristic, being of that strangely exhilarating quality of salt freshness that in every part of the United Provinces served as a perpetual reminder of the sea. It was warm to-day, and the sun was golden in the foliage, and lay in scattered flecks of light among the flowers, and on the pond where two waterlilies were slowly closing to the evening.

"You may speak quite frankly now," said Mary, as they proceeded slowly down the gravel path. "Have you a message from Lady Sunderland?"

"No, Madame," said Basilea, surprised that the Princess should seem to expect it. "Only—it is difficult to express, Highness—but there are monstrous tales abroad in France, England, and even here——"

The Princess looked at her silently.

"They do say," continued Basilea, "that His Highness meddleth in the affairs of England, and these rumours give disquietude to His Majesty——"

Mary broke in, rather breathless—

”I know nothing of business—my husband heareth so much of it abroad that he is glad to talk of other matters at home. What doth Lady Sunderland want of me?”

Basilea answered directness with directness.

”She wisheth to know—that the Earl may put it privately before His Majesty—your mind on the matter between His Highness and the King.”

”What matter is that?” asked Mary.

Basilea was at a loss.

”Your Highness must know better than I: as for these horrible rumours——”

Mary paused by a rose bush and asked steadily—

”What rumours?”

”I think it would be unseemly to name them!”

”I will hold you excused,” said the Princess, still gravely.

”Then, Madame, ’tis said that His Highness is so exasperate with the policy of His Majesty and postponement of your claim by the birth of the Prince, that he might attempt to do what my Lord Monmouth did——”

Mary’s fine fingers pulled delicately at the rose leaves.

”My husband and that poor unhappy gentleman are such different characters and in such different situations,” she said, ”that there can be no comparison. I think the Prince would never do as the Duke did.”

Basilea looked at her keenly.

”’Tis asserted, Lady Sunderland saith, that the Prince is in league with all the discontents of England, that he sheltereth many at The Hague——”

”This country,” answered the Princess quietly, ”hath always been a refuge for the unfortunate, and it is reasonable that the near connection of my husband to the throne should give him an interest in English business.”

Basilea was older than the Princess, whose air of extreme gentleness further emboldened her to take, half unconsciously, a masterful tone.

”I can assure Lady Sunderland that His Highness is innocent of the designs imputed to him.”

Mary glanced up from the rose bush; she smiled very slightly.

”Why, you must go to the Prince for that assurance; I know nothing about it.”

Basilea stirred the gravel with her square-toed red shoe.

”You must know, Madame,” she said slowly, ”whether you would hinder or further the Prince his projects?”

Mary flushed, and the full brown eyes narrowed.

”Neither you nor I,” she answered, ”can discuss His Highness his projects, which ever have been and will be for the good of Europe.”

Basilea looked at her curiously.

”I fear Your Highness will think me impertinent, but,” she thought of the grave words of M. D’Avaux, and the memory urged her not to be put off by the evasiveness of the Princess—”but there are strange things said in Paris and London——”

”Madame de Marsac,” interrupted Mary gently, ”if my father hath cause to complain of me, he must send a direct messenger.”

Basilea felt herself rebuked.

”I do not carry His Majesty’s complaints, Highness,” she answered humbly. ”I am but the poor engine of the fears of my Lady Sunderland, who saith that in London the Prince his name is on the lips of all the discontents, and it is feared that they might set him up as a pretender; and since that could not be if you refused your consent, it would be a great comfort to His Majesty and his faithful ministers if you would give that assurance.”

The Princess took a step forward, then stopped as if by an effort of self-control.

”I cannot deal with these secret and underground counsels,” she said firmly; ”and my poor brains are not fit for business.”

”This is not business, Highness,” urged Basilea.

”Whatever you call it,” demanded the Princess, ”why did you undertake it?”

”Because M. D’Avaux——” began Basilea, then stopped vexed; she had not meant to mention that name.

”M. D’Avaux,” repeated Mary, with a heightened colour; ”so he hath a mind to know what I shall do if a certain crisis cometh?”

Both the tone and the words seemed to betray more interest and knowledge than she had yet disclosed, and Basilea was encouraged.

”M. D’Avaux is an acquaintance of mine,” she said frankly.

”Ah yes,” replied Mary; ”you are a Papist, and your husband was a Frenchman. I think that meaneth,” she added courteously, ”that we cannot see things the same.”

”Your Highness doth not desire to behold Europe embroiled in another war!”

Mary answered earnestly—

”There is nothing further from my wishes, and no ambition of mine,” she added half wistfully, ”would disturb anybody’s peace. I bless my God that I know the life I am suited to, and I thank Him that He hath given me the grace to know when I am happy.”

She put her hand gently on Basilea’s sleeve.

”It is getting too dark to remain here, and you have not even looked at my roses!”

Basilea admitted herself defeated. She was a little chagrined at the thought

of the lame report she would have to give M. D'Avaux, but she could press no more, especially as she had an uneasy feeling that the Princess thought the less of her for the errand she had come upon.

She left talk of politics, and Mary accompanied her with easy courtesy to the front of the villa, where her hired chariot waited with her maid yawning herself to death over an old-fashioned romance by Mademoiselle de Scudery, which she had found in the inn parlour.

The sky was paling and flushing behind the great avenue of trees rich in their full leafage, and the rooks were noisy in the branches.

"This is a pretty spot, Highness," said Basilea, on the impulse of the moment.

Mary smiled.

Two men were mounting the few wide entrance steps. Basilea noticed them, because one was the red-breeched sailor whom she had seen yesterday beneath her window, the other was a slight gentleman in a circular mantle turned up over one shoulder, wearing riding boats and carrying a whip; Basilea saw his horse being led off by a bareheaded groom.

She could not restrain her curiosity at seeing the seaman entering the Prince's villa.

"Doth Your Highness know that man?" she asked.

Mary glanced at the two as she closed the gate in the garden wall.

"Which?" she asked, smiling.

"The English sailor——"

"No; but he hath good credentials, for that is the Prince with him," said Mary quietly.

Basilea was further surprised; she endeavoured to gain a closer view of the Stadtholder and his companion, but they had entered the house; she was satisfied, however, that she had something to tell M. D'Avaux.

"You must not marvel at the companion of His Highness," continued the Princess; "there are many come here who are glad to wear disguises, owing to the rancour of the persecution of the Protestants in France."

Basilea courtsied her leave. She was quite convinced that the seaman was not French nor on any message from France, and she was beginning to be convinced, too, that the Princess was marvellously changed and different, and that it would be well for neither Lady Sunderland nor M. D'Avaux to be too sure of her compliance.

Mary allowed her to depart without that demonstration of kindness with which she had received her, and Basilea stepped into her chariot feeling disappointed and dissatisfied.

Mary, still standing by the garden wall at the side of the house, watched the little coach swing out of sight down the long darkening drive, and when it

was lost in the shadows ran lightly up the steps and in through the tall doors: there, in the light painted vestibule, she found the Prince and the English seaman conversing.

She paused, flushed, and breathing in pants. The Prince took off his hat, and said—

"This is the Princess, sir."

The sailor turned quickly, and gave her a sharp look as he bowed.

"This is Admiral Herbert, Madame," continued the Prince, "who is new come from England."

The colour receded from Mary's face. She glanced in a half frightened way at her husband.

"Oh," she murmured, "I wished to speak to you—but it can wait—for I suppose Admiral Herbert his business is ... important."

There was a tenseness of containment among the three of them, as if they were all aware of great events and would not speak of them.

"If the Princess is informed——" began Arthur Herbert.

The Stadtholder interrupted.

"The Princess knoweth everything, Mr. Herbert."

Arthur Herbert betrayed the slightest surprise, covered instantly by a ready turn of speech.

"Her Highness will understand, then, the importance of my business."

He bowed again, very courteous, to Mary, who answered instantly—

"I will not hinder you, Mr. Herbert, not for an instant."

The Prince looked at her.

"Send for me when I am free, Madame."

With that they both saluted her, and turned into the room at the right of the vestibule.

Mary stood motionless in the twilight, staring at the spot where the English messenger had stood, peered at the closed door that concealed him, then went softly and, it seemed, fearfully away.

CHAPTER VI
THE LETTERS OF MR. HERBERT

When Admiral Herbert found himself closeted with William of Orange, he had

some eagerness in observing that Prince whose name was so much in the mouths of men, and who had grown to be a kind of lodestar to Protestant England.

The first thing that impressed a courtier of the Stewarts, used to a lavish and extravagant habit of living, was that there was no splendour in the plain dark room, the stern furnishing of which seemed almost parsimony in a royal Prince, nor any manner of display about the Stadtholder himself, who, with his own hands, shifted the candles in the brass sticks from the mantelshelf to the table, and set open the window on the summer woods.

Arthur Herbert looked keenly at him; he had dropped his hat and mantle on to a chair, and his person was fully revealed in the steady red candle glow.

He was at this time in his thirty-seventh year, at the height of his reputation: the most respected statesman, one of the most feared generals and powerful rulers in Europe, the head of the nation which was supreme in trade and maritime dominion, the foremost champion of the reformed religion, first Prince of the blood in England, the close ally and councillor of the Empire, of Spain, the Northern States, Germany, and, as it was whispered, of the Pope, the leader of the English opposition, and husband to the heiress of that country, the rallying point for the discontents and indignations of all those whom the King of France had injured or the King of England put out of humour.

This combination of circumstance and quality that had given him the unique position he held, made him the most discussed and famous figure at present before the eyes of men. Even where he was abused and decried he was never forgotten, and shared in the minds of the French almost as much attention as their own exalted King.

Added to his present fame was the glamour of past heroism, the history of his splendid house, the great deeds of his ancestors, his own breaking from unhappy childhood and desolate youth to power in one day of chaos and ruin, blood and despair, his almost miraculous deliverance of his country, constant devotion to it, and his firm adherence to the persecuted religion were unique in the history of princes, and lived in the minds of men.

The man who was of this estimation in Europe, who possessed so many extraordinary qualities, and had had so strange a history, appeared to the Englishman as a gentleman of no particular appearance of energy, rather below than above the middle height, and of a frail physique and slenderness of proportion rare in a man of action, and which reminded Herbert of my Lord Shaftesbury, whose impetuous and fiery manners had counteracted the effect of his feeble person.

The Stadtholder differed there, being entirely composed and stately, and holding himself with a certain stiff control, as one trained to maintain dignity and the foremost place in the sight of men.

His countenance was manly, grave, and remarkable, chiefly by reason of his large brilliant eyes of a lively hazel, sparkling and expressive, and his thick dark brown hair, which he wore falling on to his collar like an old-fashioned cavalier; his high aquiline nose, full mouth very firmly set, slightly cleft chin and hollowed cheeks, clear and tanned complexion, conveyed a subtle sense of youth and simplicity, despite his rather severe and austere expression, as if at heart he was still as ardent as when he wrested the three conquered provinces from the French; his face, though thin and worn, was unlined.

He wore a violet riding coat of a heavy fashion, and a cravat of thick Bruges lace and a plain sword. Herbert would never have taken him for a soldier. He wondered if he would ever please the English as he had done the Dutch, or courts as he did people, and was conscious of an unreasonable feeling of incongruity in this being the man looked to as the saviour of England, indeed of half Europe.

The Prince pulled off his gloves slowly, the while looking on the floor. He was seated the other side of the table to Herbert, who thought he had found some reluctance or difficulty in speaking, perhaps because he was using English, with which language he was tolerably familiar, but spoke with no kind of grace, but rather a distaste.

"You are sent by Mr. Sidney?" he asked at last.

He had a short, strong way of speaking; his manner was stately to coldness. Arthur Herbert looked in vain for any trace of emotion or curiosity as to the momentous errand he must know that he, Herbert, had come upon, or even, as he reflected rather vexedly, any welcome for himself.

"By Mr. Sidney and some others, sir," he answered.

The Prince put his gloves on the table, and raised his eyes.

"You have, Mr. Herbert, brought some answer to my late request that some powerful English families should give me a written invitation to this expedition to which the Protestant lords have so constantly, and, of late, so insistently urged me."

Admiral Herbert put his hand into the breast of his common coat, and pulled out a sealed packet, which he handed to the Prince.

"This association, Your Highness, of which you have had advices from my Lord Shrewsbury and Mr. Sydney, is at length signed by seven of our great men, and I pray Your Highness to take it as full warrant for interfering in the present miserable estate of England."

After having delivered this speech, Admiral Herbert looked straightly at the Prince, who was slowly breaking the seals. He felt more enthusiasm for the cause than for His Highness, and more warmly for both when he was not in the actual presence of the Prince, whose personal coldness had an ill effect on the Englishman's impatient nature.

”This is Mr. Sidney his hand,” remarked the Prince.

Arthur Herbert laid another letter on the dark, shining table.

”There is also a personal letter from that gentleman.”

William looked rapidly over the contents of the packet, and his thin cheek flushed.

”This is definite,” he said.

”Your Highness asked that it might be.”

The Prince took up the other letter, and read it over with great quickness.

”Mr. Sidney saith my Lord Nottingham would not sign,” he remarked; ”is that timidity?”

”Some manner of prudence, I suppose, sir; but he will not betray our design. He gave us leave to take his life if we thought him capable of it; but I believe he can go to Court and not discover any sign of the concern he is under, so close a man he is.”

”Oh, he is honest,” said William dryly. He took up the first letter again; it was signed at the bottom by seven numbers, thus: 25, 24, 27, 29, 31, 35, 33; the Prince did not require the code sent him by Henry Sidney to discover the names these numbers stood for; he had the cipher by heart, and knew that the seven who had signed were Lord Shrewsbury, Lord Devonshire, Lord Danby, Lord Lumley, the suspended Compton, Bishop of London, Admiral Russell, and Mr. Sydney himself. They represented a body of opinion that was weighty; if they were not many, they were powerful, and the Prince himself had said that he did not need many names if they were those of great families. Lord Halifax, who had been one of his warmest supporters, had shrunk from the first hint of anything so violent as a revolution, and the Prince had forbidden the design to be opened to him; for the scruples of Lord Nottingham he had also been prepared; therefore the signatures were the utmost that he could have hoped for; but he gave no sign of excitement or satisfaction, but sat thoughtfully looking at the two papers in his hand.

”Mr. Sidney saith that you are well instructed in these affairs, Mr. Herbert,” he said at last, raising his great eyes. ”This paper is well composed and comprehensive, but it saith nothing of how far the King is suspicious of these gentlemen and their correspondence with me. And that is an important matter.”

Admiral Herbert answered instantly.

”The King is kept amused by my Lord Sunderland, sir, who hath his entire confidence.”

”My Lord Sunderland hath not openly joined you?”

”No, sir; and in truth his conduct is a mystery, but Mr. Sidney hath a pledge from the Countess that he will not betray us.”

”I am tolerably sure of my lord,” answered the Prince. ”He hath control of

the foreign correspondence, hath he not?"

"Yes, Your Highness. We have felt some fears for M. D'Albeville, the King his envoy here, it being generally believed that he is in the pay of M. Barillon."

"He receiveth some kind of pension from him," said the Prince calmly, "and maketh him all manner of promises. But he is better fee'd by me, and I do know that he sendeth beguiling letters home."

"Then I think there is no one likely to open the King his eyes. It all resteth now on the resolution of Your Highness."

The Prince very faintly smiled.

"They suggest any attempt, if any be made, this year, do they not?" he said, instantly grave again.

"At once, sir, is what we should wish."

The Prince rose and crossed to the hearth.

"This winter would be the soonest," he answered quietly. "Tell me more of England—it is the King his purpose to call a packed parliament in the autumn?"

Arthur Herbert replied with a kind of angry energy that betrayed the force that had involved him in these intrigues.

"The charters being taken from the towns, the franchise is in the King his hands, and is only to be granted to those who will swear to return His Majesty his candidate, the Protestant Lord-Lieutenants have been displaced by Catholic, and they have orders to let no one into office who will not consent to the repeal of the Test Act—so we are all officered by Papists, and to be a Protestant is to starve."

"My uncle," said the Prince, with an accent of cold contempt, "would never make a good tyrant; when liberty is conquered 'tis by more subtle ways than this."

Arthur Herbert's eyes sparkled.

"I tell you, sir, that in one place where the electorate hath been reduced to fifteen, even these are so little to be relied upon, the King was told his man had no chance."

"Why, surely," answered William, "the English are not of a spirit to endure this monstrous breakage of the laws."

Arthur Herbert looked at him again with that half admiration, half dislike; in truth there was nothing in common between the two men but enthusiasm for the same cause—in the one transient, impulsive, based on personal interest; in the other strong, unchanging, deep as life itself.

Some weeks ago the Englishman had received a letter from the Prince offering him his protection, and Arthur Herbert could not recognise in the quiet Stadtholder the writer of that warm, firm, courteous, well turned letter, but none too quick as his perceptions were, they perceived that there must be something

in this man that he had missed; the fire and ardour might escape him, but it must be there. Meanwhile, gratitude was still his cue; warming with a real sense of the grievous hurts done to the liberties of England, he proceeded to enlarge on the text of the letter, to paint the distracted, exasperated condition of the public mind in England, the common hopes of the Prince, the ardent desire among the most prudent and knowing men of affairs for his active interference before the packed parliament was called to force the repeal of the Test Act, the disbelief in the young heir being a child of the Queen's, and the small chance that either the army or the navy would be loyal to James.

The Prince listened with attention but no sign of feeling; when Mr. Herbert finished William crossed to the window and closed it, the draught was setting the candles guttering.

"M. Zuylestein hath been successful?" he asked, and coughed a little.

"He seemeth a most able man, sir; at his secret house in Greg Street all this hath been considered and performed. We did desire him to remain in England until we had an answer from Your Highness, and, to give a careless air to his staying, he hath gone into the country."

"It is well," answered the Prince, approaching the table. "Mr. Herbert, you shall have your answer very soon. I shall to-night consult with M. Fagel and M. Dyckfelt, who, as you know, were aware of these affairs from the first inception of them; to-morrow I will advise with you again. Meanwhile I will ask you to take your entertainment at my house."

He paused to draw breath, as he always did after any save those very brief sentences he usually employed. The asthma he had had for years was obvious in these painful gasping breaths and constant coughs.

"You have done me a great service," he continued. "I am very much obliged to you; you are a man of spirit."

Admiral Herbert rose.

"I am greatly indebted to the generosity of Your Highness; but there are spies at The Hague, and it might give a colour to reports already too persistent were I discovered to be lodging with Your Highness. Among the fugitives from England in the town I am easily hid."

Again William gave his faint, instantly checked smile.

"I am glad that you are not forgetful of prudence, Mr. Herbert. We cannot be too careful."

Mr. Herbert hesitated, eyed the Prince, then said, with more boldness than he felt—

"I must tell Your Highness that there is one matter, too delicate to commit to writing, that hath been in debate among your friends in London——"

"Ah?" questioned the Prince.

”—’tis the attitude of the Princess, sir.”

William seemed to slightly stiffen and straighten.

”What should her attitude be but the same as mine?” he asked.

Mr. Herbert coloured.

”Forgive me, sir, she is King James his daughter——”

The Prince interrupted—

”Also my wife,” he said quietly, but with extraordinary force and, it seemed, pride. ”You shall hear the lady for yourself, sir.”

He touched a heavy bell on the table and a servant instantly appeared.

”Request the presence of Her Highness,” he said, then spoke again to Herbert when the man had gone.

”It is only just that in this great issue in which she is so intimately concerned that you should hear her mind from her own lips.”

”No one doubteth the loyalty of the Lady Mary to yourself, sir,” answered Mr. Herbert, lying cheerfully, for he had been one of the most cynical in discussing this same loyalty in London.

William coughed again, and seated himself by the table with his Frisian lace handkerchief pressed to his lips. Mr. Herbert was suddenly impressed by the fact that he looked not only ill but in pain.

A little pause of silence, and the Princess entered. She had changed her gown, and wore a dress of the same stiff pattern in white brocade, with tinsel and a ribbon of pearls in her hair.

William rose and gave her one look as she closed the door, then lowered his eyes as he spoke.

”Madame, Mr. Herbert cometh from England with an invitation to me from my friends there to go there with a force to protect the laws and the religion——”

”Ah!” exclaimed Mary; she came straight to the table and dazzled in the candlelight. Mr. Herbert looked at her, and noticed only her comeliness; he was not a man to distinguish types or degrees in beauty. If a woman were pretty, to him she was nothing more, and the prettier she was the less he credited her with sense or strength. The Princess’s air of dignity and spiritual look did not save her from this judgment; he dismissed her as a pleasing young creature, useful for nothing save to smile and work fantastic finery when she was not saying her prayers. He smiled, therefore, at the Prince’s grave way of speaking to her; she seemed, he noticed, much moved, her body quivered, and she fixed her eyes on her husband with a painful intensity.

”You know,” he continued, with a certain simplicity that had a curious effect, taken with his great seriousness, ”the project that was first suggested to me by Lord Mordaunt a year gone; this hath been repeated by weightier men, and the times are riper——”

He paused rather abruptly.

”Will you tell Mr. Herbert that you would approve of this undertaking?” he finished, and with a palpable effort.

Mary withdrew her eyes to fix them on Mr. Herbert.

”Surely,” she said, ”you do not require that assurance from me?”

She gave a little weak laugh, and clasped her hands tightly and unclasped them.

”I do not know what words to choose to convince you how utterly I am in the hands of my husband, nor how foolish I am in matters of business.” She drew a deep breath, and added, with a blushing earnestness, ”If circumstances permit my husband to make this attempt, my will is one with his in the design, which I consider holy as well as just——”

Mr. Herbert bowed, and the bright young beauty added with the gravity that was her manner—

”—but if my husband his design was not just, I fear I should still support him in it!”

Mr. Herbert could do nothing but bow to this outspoken statement; if the words were spontaneous or learnt, lesson fashion, from the Prince, was no matter to him. They set at rest the doubts some of the seven, particularly Lord Danby, had raised concerning her attitude.

He took his leave of the Princess, and she seemed like one amazed, as if she neither saw nor heard him. The Prince went with him into the antechamber, and the last look Herbert had of Mary was the sight of her standing quite still, with her face as pale as the little braid of pearls in her dark hair, and the fingers of her right hand pressed to the tinsel bows on her stiff bodice.

In a few moments the Prince returned, and then she moved abruptly and took the tall-backed walnut chair Mr. Herbert had occupied, pushed it from the table, and gazed up at her husband.

He had still the two letters in his hand. He looked at Mary. With the departure of the Englishman his manner had entirely changed; this was very noticeable, though he said nothing.

”You are fatigued,” said Mary in a shaking voice, ”so fatigued—I know——”

He cast the letters down between them.

”Oh, silly!” he answered, ”that must be always thinking of my fatigues!”

He put his thin hand over hers, that rested on the edge of the table, and gave an excited little laugh.

”Thou hast heard this man, Mary.... I think I am pledged to an extraordinary

task."

CHAPTER VII
THE SILENT WOOD

Mary answered simply, but with a dreadful force of emotion—

"You will go?"

He replied to her tone more than to her words.

"Nay, I must." He pressed the fingers lying cold under his. "Do thou forgive me, but I must."

"Oh, God pity me!" cried Mary.

The Prince flushed.

"There is no other way to preserve Christendom," he said; "if I do not take this step there is a life's work wasted, and we are no better than we were in '72."

"I know," she answered hastily. "I know—but—oh, that our duty had lain another way! Yet I will not be weak; if I cannot help I will not hinder."

She bit her lip to keep back tears, it seemed, and smiled valiantly.

"Tell me all that Mr. Herbert said," she asked.

He broke out at that.

"These foreigners! That black-avised stalwart thinketh of nothing but his own interest. He cometh here, in his feeble disguise, like a boy playing at a game, and, by Heaven, 'tis the manner they all take it in——"

"You must not call them foreigners," said Mary, in a quick distress; "your mother's people and mine——"

The Prince lifted his hand from hers, and let it fall impatiently.

"Foreigners to me! Once I may have felt that tie, but now I dislike them when they flatter and when they sneer." He changed abruptly to a tenderer tone. "What had you to say to me?"

"Nothing," she answered, "of importance beside this news; only that an old schoolfellow of mine—a meddling Papist—(God forgive me, but I liked her not) sought to sound me to-day, set on by M. D'Avaux, who must guess something—but what is that beside this?"

She pointed piteously to the letters.

"They have committed themselves now, these gentlemen," remarked William, with a certain grim satisfaction. "They can scarcely go back on their

written word, even these weathercocks of Englishmen."

"They want you to go—this year?" She could not keep a certain energy of fear from her tone.

"Before the parliament is called in the autumn," he said concisely.

Mary rose abruptly and crossed to the window. The rustle of her stiff gown made a noticeable sound in the stillness, which was deep and intense—the inner stillness of the house set in the outer stillness of the wood. The glance of the Prince followed her. He stood silent.

"There must be difficulties." She spoke without looking round.

"Difficulties! Ah yes, and these English do not guess one-half of them."

She made no reply. Her head bent and her fingers fumbled at the latch, which she presently undid, and a great breath of cool air, pure, with the perfume of a hundred trees, swept into the room.

The wood was motionless, the boughs dark against a lighter sky; one or two stars pulsed secretively through and above the leafage, for all the summer night they had a cold look, as if they circled in far-off frozen latitudes.

Mary knew and loved the wood so well that she was sensitive to those subtle changes in it which were like moods in a human being; to-night, unseen, shadowed like the thought of coming trouble, it seemed to her sad, mysterious, and lonely, as the image of retreating happiness.

She rested her head against the mullions, and presently put her hands up to her face. Her husband, who had stood without a movement by the table watching her, at this crossed over to her side.

"I would to God," he said with energy, "that this could be helped. I would the scandal of a break with your father could be avoided. But he hath had every chance to be my friend and ally—you must admit, Mary, that he hath had every chance."

The few words conveyed to the Princess his meaning. She knew that he referred to his long uphill struggle, lasting close on twenty years, to induce England to shake off the yoke of France, and, in taking her proper place among nations, restore the balance of power in Europe. Throughout the years of the disgraceful reign of his Uncle Charles, William had never swerved from his policy of endeavouring to detach him from France, for it was very evident that but little headway could be made against Louis while England was in his pay. When James had come to the throne, the Stadtholder, with the utmost patience, had changed his tactics to please the new King, and had, as he said, given him every chance to put himself at the head of the inevitable conflict between France and Europe, which must shortly take place.

Mary knew this; she knew how reluctantly her husband would employ force against so near a kinsman, how unwillingly he would leave Holland, how

much long experience had taught him to mistrust the levity of the English, even those most professedly friendly to him, and she was aware that only a tremendous need could force him to this tremendous resolution, which was at once more daring and more necessary than any man could realize save himself.

In her heart she blamed her father most bitterly for forcing on them this hateful expedient; but would not say so, nor open her heart at all on that matter, lest her lips said more than her conscience could approve.

So to this remark that she so perfectly understood she replied nothing, and did not move her hands from her face.

The Prince spoke again rapidly.

"Everything is strained to breaking-point, and he who strikes the first blow will have the advantage. If I go into the fight again without the help of England, I am no better than a man fighting with tied hands——"

He paused, and added with vigour—

"We cannot do it alone. We must have England."

It was what he had said sixteen years ago in '72, and the years had made the need more, not less, imperative. He continued, as if he justified himself to that still figure of his wife, with her hands before her face.

"I am forced to this decision. No consideration of justice, of ambition, nay, even of diplomacy or good sense, can move His Majesty to break off with France; his insults to the liberty of England are incredible. He hath done all he can to thwart, cross, and hamper me. And now is the moment when we must try conclusions."

The Princess's white brocade shivered with her trembling.

"I know," she murmured—"I know."

But she was weeping, and the tears ran down through her fingers.

The Prince was at a loss to know why she was so distressed. She had long been involved with him in the growing rupture with her father, to whom no affection or respect bound her, but the mere name of duty, and lately she had been well aware that the actions of the King were driving the Prince into open opposition.

He looked at her, rather pale, and frowned.

"You think of your father..." he said, ... "your father..."

Mary, who knew that tears vexed him, endeavoured to check her sobbing; but she could not control her voice to speak.

"I am indeed unfortunate," added the Prince rather grimly, "that to do what I must do I am under the necessity of the scandal of a breach in my own family."

She answered faintly, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes—

"God forgive me, I did not think of His Majesty."

"Of what, then?"

There was the slightest pause, and then she answered steadily, still staring out at the dark wood—

"Of—ourselves. Of the great change this will make—success or failure."

The Prince was silent.

"I have been," continued Mary, very low, "so happy here—in the life most suited to me, in this dear country, where every one is so good as to love me a little."

The candlelight glimmered in the little braid of pearls in her hair and flowed in lines of light down her thick satin gown, showed, too, her cheek colourless and glistening with tears.

The Prince, standing close to her, with his back to the window, watched, but neither spoke nor moved.

"It is nigh ten years," she said, "since you went to the war ... and now the peace will be broken again.... And I know not how I can well bear it if you leave me."

The Prince was still silent, and studied her dimly seen face (for her back was to the light) with what was almost a passionate attention.

"I am a poor creature," she added, with a kind of desperate contempt for herself, "to think of my wretched self at such a juncture; what are my own melancholies compared to what you must undergo? Yet, humanly speaking, I have no courage to face this crisis ... that my father should be guilty of such a horrible crime against Church and State, and you bound by your duty to oppose him by force——"

"It had to be," said the Prince sombrely. "This rupture was inevitable from the first, though I tried to deny it to myself. But in my heart I knew, yea, ever since '72, that England would never get herself out of this tangle from within."

"But it is hard," replied Mary; "even though I know the hand of God in it——"

She turned her eyes, tearless now, but moist and misty, on her husband, and added simply—

"If you knew how happy I have been here you would understand how I dread the mere chance of leaving it——"

"I shall return," he answered. "It is not possible nor wishful that I should dethrone the King; but I will get such a handle to English affairs that they will never league with France again; and thou—thou needest not leave The Hague for an hour."

"There is the least of my troubles disposed of," she answered sadly. "For you forget how your poor wife loves you, and how the thoughts of the manifold perils, and your own rash temper that will not regard dangers, will put me into a fright which will come between me and God Himself."

The tears gushed up again, but she checked them, dabbing her eyes with a damp handkerchief, while she exclaimed on the gasp of a trembling laugh—

"If I cry any more I shall be blind for a week!"

The Prince put his hand on her shoulder.

"'Tis a silly to spend tears for me," he said, "who will go into no more dangers than I have ever been used to, and who only taketh the common risk of common men——" He paused a moment, then added abruptly—

"Yet God He knoweth these tears of thine are all I have in the world for my solace, and I was one of Fortune her favourites, child, to have you to my wife."

His hand fell from her white sleeves, and she caught it between hers so that the rings he wore pressed into her palms.

"Only love and pity me a little," she said, "and I can bear anything. For surely I only live to serve you."

A pause fell, more hushed than common silence; they stood side by side looking out on to the wood, now sad and dark, which had surrounded all their united lives.

Mary was in that mood which takes refuge from the real facts in symbol. She did not look back on her life, but on the history of the wood since she had known it; radiant in summer, complaining in the wind, silent in the rain, bare and bright and wonderful amid the snow, flushed with loveliness in the spring. She thought that this pageant had ended for her, that though the wood might bloom and change she would never see it again after these leaves fell; she had been haunted, though not troubled, all her life by the presentiment of an early death, and now this feeling, which she had never imparted to any, became one with the feeling that the wood was passing, ending for her, and that all the thousand little joys and fears associated with the trees, the flowers, the sunshine, and the snow, were fading and perishing to a mere memory.

Her fingers tightened on the Prince's hand.

"'Tis such a beautiful night," she said in a strange voice; "it maketh me feel I must die."

He, who all his life had lived on the verge of death, smiled to hear these words uttered by blooming youth.

"You," he said calmly, "have no need to think of that for many a year. Death and you! Come, you have stared too long into the dark."

Reluctantly she let his hand free, and latched the window with something of a shiver, but smiled too at the same time, in a breathless way.

"What will you do now?" she asked.

The Prince went to the table and snuffed the candles with the shining brass snuffers, and the flames rose up still and pointed.

"I have sent for M. Dyckfelt and M. Fagel," he answered, and seated himself

on one of the stiff walnut chairs. His face was bloodless under the tan of his outdoor life. The excitement that had shown when Mr. Herbert left had utterly gone; he was composed, even sombre and melancholy, and his thoughts were not to be guessed by his countenance.

Mary looked at him with an almost terrified longing for him to disclose his mind, to some way speak to her, but he seemed every second to sink deeper into a silence that was beyond her meddling.

She moved about the room softly, picked up her sewing from a cabinet in the corner, and began disentangling the coloured cottons that had been hastily flung together.

The Prince looked round at her suddenly.

"Have you seen Dr. Burnet of late?" he asked.

"Yes—he came yesterday when you were out hunting."

"Well," said William, "not a word of this to him—I would not trust him with anything I would not say before my coachman."

Mary smiled; she shared her husband's dislike to the officious, bustling clergyman who considered himself so indispensable to the Protestant cause, and who was tolerated for the real use he had been to the Prince.

"Can you not trust my discretion?" she asked.

He gave her a brilliant smile.

"Why, I think you are a fair Politic, after all——"

The usher, entering to say that the Grand Pensionary and M. Dyckfelt were without, interrupted him, and the Princess, pale and grave again, said hastily—

"I will go—but I shall be in the withdrawing-room when they have gone——"

She waited till William had dismissed the usher, then added, in a tremble—

"—You will let me know what you have decided? I could not sleep else," she added piteously.

He held out his hand and drew her up to him.

"Child," he said earnestly, "'tis already decided; 'tis only the means to be discussed—and those thou shalt hear at once."

He patted her hand and let her go. With a kind of wild gaiety she caught up her sewing silks. She was laughing, but it was a laughter more desperate than her gravity. She did not look at the Prince again, but hurried from the room, a gleam of satins in the sombre setting.

The Prince looked after her, then picked up the two letters from England.

CHAPTER VIII
THE POLICY OF THE PRINCE

Gaspard Fagel, Grand Pensionary of Holland, and M. Dyckfelt, entered the little room where the Prince awaited them. They were both statesmen who had been trained under the last Grand Pensionary, John de Witt, whose Parliamentary Republic had kept the Prince twenty years out of his hereditary offices, and both retained something of the simplicity and sternness of their early life, especially M. Dyckfelt, who wore the plain falling band of the Republican era and a suit old-fashioned in primness and sombre colour.

He was a cleverer man than M. Fagel, who was utterly and entirely under the dominion of the Stadtholder, and saw too clearly with his master's eyes even to have an opinion of his own. His manner to the Prince was the more humble, but both addressed him with that deep respect which does not preclude perfect openness.

William looked at them both sharply, then down at the letters in his hand.

"I have received the invitation from England for which I have been waiting," he said.

M. Dyckfelt bowed, and M. Fagel answered—

"May I congratulate Your Highness——"

"Not yet," interrupted William. "Listen first to these letters—they ask almost the impossible."

He made a little gesture to the straight chairs the other side of the table, and the two seated themselves. M. Dyckfelt had flushed with eagerness and excitement, M. Fagel looked tired and ill. They were both considerably older than the Prince, both men of a fine type with honest, shrewd faces.

William drew his chair nearer the table and held the letters under the glow of the flame of the tall wax candles.

"These," he said, looking down at the flowing English writing, "were brought me by Mr. Herbert, whom I suppose you met, M. Dyckfelt, in England, and are written by Mr. Sidney."

He paused with a little cough; neither of the other two men spoke.

”In the preamble,” continued William, ”they say that they are pleased to learn from M. Zuylestein that I will be of assistance to them, but they fear the difficulties; and though every one is so dissatisfied with the King his government it would not be safe to speak to them beforehand—and though they might venture themselves on my landing they will do nothing now.” He smiled unpleasantly, and added, ”In brief, they are on the winning side, and I must go with strength enough to defend myself until they can be gotten into some order. For the army, they say the discontent is such that the King could not count on them, and for the navy, they believe not one in ten would do him any service in such a cause.”

”Mine own observations confirm this advice,” said M. Dyckfelt, with his eyes fixed on the Prince. ”And M. Zuylestein hath writ the same.”

William made no comment on that.

”Now,” he said, ”we come to the gist of the business, which is, that these gentlemen fear affairs will be worse next year, both by the officering of the army with Irish Catholics, the calling of a packed Parliament to pass the repeal of the Test Act, and the employment of violent means against the remaining liberties of the Protestants.”

He raised his brilliant eyes to the two intent faces opposite.

”Therefore they wish me to undertake this expedition this year.”

A soft exclamation broke from Gaspard Fagel.

”Can it be done?”

”If it must be done it can be done,” said the Prince firmly; ”and I think it is ’nunc aut nunquam,’ M. Fagel.”

M. Dyckfelt gave a movement of irrepressible excitement.

”Do they not recognise the difficulties of Your Highness?”

William looked again at the letter.

”These are their words, Mynheer: ’If the circumstances stand so with Your Highness, that you believe you can get here time enough, in a condition to give assistance this year sufficient for a relief under these circumstances which have been so represented, we who subscribe this will not fail to attend Your Highness upon your landing, and to do all that lies in our power to prepare others to be in as much readiness as such an action is capable of, where there is so much danger in communicating an affair of such a nature, till it be near the time of its being made public.’ Then follow their difficulties: ’We know not what alarm your preparations for this expedition may give, or what notice it will be necessary for you to give the States beforehand, by either of which means their intelligence or suspicions here may be such as may cause us to be secured before your landing—_’”

William laid the paper down.

”That is their main trouble—they doubt whether I can be so secret as not to cause them and all like to support me to be clapt up before I sail—and wish to know my opinion on it—further, they mislike my compliment to the King on the birth of the Prince of Wales, which hath, they say, done me injury among the Protestants, of whom not one in a thousand believeth the child to be the Queen’s—and for the rest—dare I, will I, adventure on the attempt?”

He drew a deep breath as he finished this speech, and fixed his eyes on the dark, uncurtained square of the window as if he pictured something in his mind too vast, too confined, for the narrow room, and must imagine it filling the silent night without.

M. Fagel spoke, very low.

”Your Highness doth not hesitate?”

”I cannot,” answered the Prince simply; ”for it is the only way to gain England from France.”

In those plain words lay the whole policy of his life—to gain England from France, to weigh the balance of Europe against Louis by throwing into the scale against him a nation so powerful, so wealthy, and anciently so glorious as England; for ten years he had been at the hopeless task of gaining England through her King, now he was going to ignore the King and go straight to the people; but confident as he was in his destiny, the difficulties of the project seemed overwhelming.

He turned again to the letter.

”This is signed by seven great lords,” he said, ”but I do not know that they are any of them great Politics—Mr. Russell and Mr. Sidney are the most knowing in affairs, and the last sendeth me words of no great encouragement——”

He picked up the other letter.

”There is advice here that I should take M. de Schomberg for the second in command, for he is beloved in England.”

”Hath he not been too long in the service of France?” asked M. Fagel.

”Yet he resigned all his posts when the Edict of Nantes was revoked,” said M. Dyckfelt. ”And being so staunch a Protestant, and so famous a captain, it would be well if Your Highness could borrow him, as Mr. Sidney saith.”

”He is very knowing in his profession,” said William, without enthusiasm; ”but I doubt he will be too dear—apart from his age, and, God forgive me, I do not relish a lieutenant of eighty.”

He leant forward with one arm resting on the dark table. Behind him was the shadowed mantelshelf and the dark picture of a storm that occupied the whole

width of the chimney shaft, obscured in gloom and touched only vaguely now and then with passing glimmers of candlelight. The Prince's face, which wore an extraordinary expression of concentration and resolve, was thrown out clearly against this darkness, for the lights stood directly before him, and the two men watching him, almost with suspended breath, were (though so familiar with his features) powerfully impressed by this intent look of unconscious strength in the mobile mouth and glowing eyes.

There was the same spirit of enthusiastic energy in his words, though his utterance was laboured and his voice husky from so much speaking.

"Those are the difficulties of the English," he said. "Mine, you know,"—he brought his fine hand down lightly on the table,—"after all they are—as always—summed up in one word—France."

The manner in which he stressed that name was almost startling in its bitterness, hatred, and challenge.

"Is it possible," asked M. Fagel, who was always at first afraid of the daring schemes of the Prince, "for you to deceive the French?"

"M. D'Avaux is a clever man," answered William grimly, "but Albeville and Sunderland will lull King James, and even I think M. Barillon. My Lord Sunderland," he added, with some admiration, "is the finest, most bewitching knave I have ever met——"

"Then," said M. Dyckfelt, "there are a many at the Court whose interest it is to keep the King deceived—namely, those nobles whose letters of service I brought to Your Highness—and from what I observed of His Majesty he was so infatuate with his own conceptions of affairs as to give scant hearing to good advice."

"That may be," answered M. Fagel. "But will France be so easily beguiled? M. D'Avaux at The Hague itself must suspect."

"He doth already," said William, in a kind of flashing shortness; "but he cannot prove his suspicions."

"Your Highness," asked M. Fagel, still anxious, "must take an army and a fleet with you——"

"You do not think," answered the Stadtholder, "that I would go with a handful of adventurers, like my poor Lord Monmouth?"

"Then," urged the Grand Pensionary, "what is to become of the States with all their defences beyond the seas and you absent?"

An expression of pain crossed William's face.

"It must be risked," he said, in his hoarse, tired voice. "Do you not suppose I have counted these risks?" he added half fiercely.

M. Fagel looked at him straightly.

”Will the States permit Your Highness to take these risks?” he asked.

”I must hope to God that the States will trust me as they have done before,” answered William, with dignity.

”Your Highness must lay down new ships, raise new companies, and under what pretence?”

”It can be done,” said William. ”Have not Algerine corsairs shown themselves in the North Sea? There is one excuse.”

M. Dyckfelt spoke now.

”I see other difficulties. I do not think that Your Highness need fear the loyalty of the States, but what of your Romanist allies, the Pope himself?”

”The Pope,” said William calmly, ”is on the verge of war with Louis over the Cologne affair, and as long as I stand against France I am assured of his secret support—and as for England, I have it from a sure hand that His Holiness was so offended by the sending of Lord Castlemaine as envoy that all King James his compliments to his nuncio have had no effect.”

He could not forbear a smile, for in truth the sending of a man who owed his very title to an infamous wife to the court of the saintly Pontiff was one of those almost incredible blunders it is difficult to believe even of a stupid man.

”I have good hopes from that incident,” continued the Prince. ”The King who made that mistake may make others.”

”Ah! Highness,” said M. Dyckfelt, ”the mistakes of King James will not help you so much as your own wisdom.”

William glanced at the speaker. In the faith and trust of such lay his surest strength. These men, incorruptible, clever, industrious, devoted, and patriotic, such as the two now facing him, were the bulwark of the position he had held fifteen years, the instruments of all his projects. These thoughts so moved in his mind that he was constrained to speak warmly.

”Mynheer, neither on my own understanding nor on the mistakes of my enemies do I rely, but on the services of such as you and M. Fagel.”

Praise was rare from the Prince they served, and at the sound of it the two grave diplomats coloured.

M. Dyckfelt answered.

”Where should Your Highness find perfect loyalty if not in us?”

”God be thanked,” said William, with a contained passion, ”I have no cause to doubt my own people. But here,” he added frankly, ”we have to deal with foreigners, and those a nation of all others light and changeable in politics, arrogant

and wilful. At present every noble out of office for not attending Mass, and every officer removed to give place to an Irish Papist, is for me; every courtier who thinketh the King insecure is my very good friend, and every country gentleman deprived of his vote raileth against King James—it will take some diplomacy, gentlemen, to combine these into a firm support for my design, and at the same time to conciliate the Catholics."

"There is a great body of fanatics very eager to call Your Highness their champion," said M. Dyckfelt.

"The Hague is full of them," replied the Prince; "but as each man spendeth all his energies in advancing his own grievances and his own schemes there is not much use in them. Methinks the Tories are a surer strength, but they love me not—only use me to save their liberties. The Whigs shout for me, but know me not——"

"They are a corrupt and shallow people," said M. Fagel.

M. Dyckfelt, who had spent several months in England marshalling the discontented factions, and putting them under the leadership of the Prince, answered this statement of the Grand Pensionary.

"There are many able, knowing, and patriotic men among them, though, being out of office, they are not so commonly heard of as the knaves who make the ministry."

William spoke with some impatience.

"Heaven help me, I would never trust an Englishman, unless it were Mr. Sidney; for when they are honest they are lazy, as Lord Halifax and Sir William Temple, and too indifferent to business to be stirred; and when they are dishonest, which I ever found the great majority, they are the most shameless creatures in the world."

"Yet in the present instant Your Highness must trust them."

William smiled grimly.

"Their heads are on their secrecy this time, Mynheer. Besides, I think these men are spirited enough if I can use them before their indignation cools."

There was a second's pause of silence, then M. Fagel spoke.

"Your Highness will require a vast deal of money."

"Yes," said the Prince dryly; "but I believe that it can be raised.'

"In England?" inquired M. Dyckfelt.

"—and among the French refugees here—and from my own fortune, Mynheer, which hath ever exceeded my wants—also, Mynheer, I hope the States will help."

"How great a sum would it be, Highness?"

William, who had the whole project already clear in his head, and had made careful calculations as to the cost, answered at once.

”About three hundred thousand pounds.”

M. Fagel was silent. His secret thought was, that to raise this money, overcome all opposition, and complete every preparation by the autumn was impossible.

The Prince was quick to divine his doubt.

”You think I cannot do it?” he asked, with that breathlessness that was a sign of his rare excitement.

”No, Highness. I think of France.”

”France!” cried William. ”I think of France also.”

”If they should attack us while you were absent—or even before you were ready——”

William lifted his hand gravely and let it fall lightly on the smooth surface of the table.

”Ah, *if*—M. Fagel,” he said solemnly; ”but that is in God His keeping, where all our destinies be—and we can but fulfil them.”

He smiled a little as if he thought of other things, and his bright gaze again sought the window, but instantly he recalled himself.

”I need detain you no more to-night—I shall need to see the States separately and the Amsterdamers—everything must be put in train immediately.”

All three rose. The two older men were much moved; before the mind of each were pictures of ten years ago when with the same deliberate courage and heroic fatalism the Prince had pitted himself against France and been forced by the treachery of Charles Stewart into the peace of Nymwegen.

Ten years ago, and ever since William had been working for and planning a renewal of the war he had then been forced to conclude; now it seemed that he had accomplished his desire, and that his re-entry into the combat would be in a manner to take the breath of Europe.

Grave men as these two were, and well used to the spectacle of high policies, they felt that extraordinary thrill which shakes those about to watch the curtain draw up on tremendous events.

They knew that in that quiet little room actions were being resolved and put in train that would stir every court in Europe and make all the pomp of Versailles show hollow if successful; and looking on the Prince, they could not think of failure.

When they had taken their leave, William locked the two letters in a Chinese escritoire. Mr. Sidney had requested that they, being in his known hand, might be destroyed, but the Prince considered his desk as safe as the fire, and was always loath to burn papers of importance.

In that same inner drawer where these letters now lay were offers of services from many famous English names, and that correspondence with Henry

Sidney which had prepared the way for the invitation received to-night; also all the letters from King James written since the marriage of Mary, which the Prince had carefully kept.

As he turned the little gold key in the smooth lock he thought of his father-in-law and of the personal aspect of his undertaking. Though he would very willingly have avoided the odium and scandal that he must incur by a break with so near a relation, he had no feelings of affection or even respect for King James. They were antagonistic in religion, character, aims, and policy. James had opposed the Prince's marriage, and ever since he had come to power opposed his every wish and desire. The withdrawal of Sidney from The Hague, the sending of Skelton in his stead, the attempt to recall and place at the disposal of France the English troops in the service of the State, his refusal to interfere with Louis' insulting seizure of Orange, his constant spyings in the household of the Princess, his endeavour to convert her to his own faith, had been all so many widenings of a breach that had never been completely closed; and, on the other hand, the Prince knew that the King had never forgiven him three things—the League of Augsburg (which confederacy of the German Princes against France was known to be his work, though his name did not appear in it), the refusal really his, though nominally the State's, to return the English troops or to put Skelton at the head of them, and his refusal to countenance the Declaration of Indulgence, even when accompanied by the tempting bribe of alliance against France.

They were, and always had been, natural enemies, despite the accident of the double tie of blood and marriage, and even the conventional compliments of their rank had long since been worn thin between them. William was indebted to his uncle for nothing. James did not even give his eldest daughter an allowance, while his youngest received a princely income; but the Prince, faithful to his unchanging policy, would have passed all this, would James have but done what Charles had always been pressed to do by his nephew, namely, join the States in an alliance against France. The Prince had, indeed, with this end in view, endeavoured to please the King on his first accession, and would have worked with him loyally as an ally.

But for the last year he had seen clearly, and with mingled wrath and pity, that James was bent on the old dishonest policy of packed parliaments, French money, and corrupt ministers, added to which was an intolerant, almost insane, bigotry which, discountenanced by the Pope himself and displeasing to all moderate Catholics, was an impossible scheme of government, and in William's eyes, all religious considerations apart, the act of a madman or a fool.

And it did not suit his statecraft to have either on the throne of England. He had waited a long time for this country, which he had seen from boyhood was essential to his schemes for the balance of power and the liberty of Europe, and

now was his moment.

As he walked up and down the plain little room he vowed that the difficulties should be conquered, and that even if the Bourbon lilies were flying over Brussels he would lead an armament to England that year.

CHAPTER IX
FRANCE MOVES

Midway through September and a beautiful day of pure gold the Prince was riding home through the brown-leaved woods that surrounded his villa. Contrary to his custom, he rode slowly, and constantly checked his fine animal, for he was thinking deeply, and those moments when he rode to and from his house were almost the only time when he was alone and not under the necessity of speaking to some one. He had just come from the last of the private sittings of the States, which had given their formal assent to the gigantic enterprise he meditated. He had now no further difficulty with his own country. The merchants, exasperated by the refusal of King Louis to allow herrings and woven goods from Holland into his country, had stifled opposition to the Prince in Amsterdam. He had always been sure of the rest of the Provinces, who, after the late persecutions of Protestants in France, the refusal to allow the Dutch in that country to retire to Holland, the constant fears they had been under since King James commenced rebuilding his navy and King Louis commenced his aggressions in Cologne, looked to the Prince with that same passionate devotion as they had done in '72, and trusted to him to save them again from dangers little less pressing; for, the last year past, Gaspard Fagel had been encouraging this dread of an armed alliance between France and England which seemed so near consummation and would be fatal to the very existence of the United Provinces.

It was from abroad came the difficulties that, for the last six months, had made the Prince's days almost unbearably anxious; and as the time drew near that anxiety became a lively torture absolutely unguessed at by those who judged the Prince by his calm, almost cold quiet. Certainly the Spartan boy with the ferret under his cloak showed no more heroic fortitude than did the Stadtholder during these weeks of preparation. Of those who surrounded him perhaps only two, his friend William Bentinck and Gaspard Fagel, understood his position, and even these could not share his sufferings, however much they might his disquietude.

From the allies whom, during the last two years, he had been marshalling into a league against Louis, there was little to fear, though it required delicate handling not to offend Catholic potentates such as the Pope and the Emperor; but from France was fearful and pressing danger, and England, where eventually success or failure must lie, was a suspicious quantity to William, who had been tricked and dealt ill with (though never deceived) by English politics all his life.

If the certain news of his expedition reached James and that monarch clapt up the Protestant lords and united with Louis in an attack on the United Provinces, William would have to face another '72 over again, and with but little better chance of success than he had then; if Louis made an attack on the frontiers of Brabant or the Spanish Lowlands before the Prince sailed the States would refuse to allow his departure, and the moment in England would be lost, perhaps for ever; if, most terrible alternative of all, he took all the forces of his country, naval and military, to England, and there met with opposition, delays, even defeat—if James roused and the English bulk were faithful to him and Louis seized the opportunity to pour his troops into defenceless Holland while her ships and men were absent—then the Prince, who loved his country with a deep and intense passion, would have to accuse himself as the author of her ruin.

Certainly he was jeopardizing the utmost any man could—the dearest thing in the world to him, beside which his own life was not even taken into consideration—and yet the only other course was to risk this same beloved liberty of his country, not by violent means, but by inaction and gradual weakening before a stronger power, and this was against all the teaching of his race, all the experience of his life, his own imperious temper, and the settled conviction both of his soul and his intelligence of what was the best, not alone for Holland but for Europe.

As he approached the 'huis ten bosch' he brought his reluctant horse to a slow walk. M. D'Avaux had done what the Prince had long expected, requested a private, informal audience, and William had told him that he should be walking in the garden at the back of his house that afternoon. As the time for this interview approached the Prince felt a weariness unutterable at the thought of meeting his enemy; he knew very well what M. D'Avaux had to say and what his own answers would be, and a smooth passage at arms with the French Ambassador was the last thing suited to his present temper.

Day after day he had to listen to, arbitrate among, encourage, check, guide, and advise the impetuous, arrogant English gathered at The Hague, and lately joined by men of importance such as my Lord Shrewsbury and my Lord Manchester, and this, to one of his reserve, was perhaps the most distasteful side of his task; it left him no leisure even for his one diversion of hunting, since it filled all the little time left from business, and begat in him a fatigue that longed for the

relaxation of the unending strain.

He had an almost feverish love of exercise and fresh air, and as he came within sight of the plain front of his house showing at the end of an avenue of magnificent trees he stayed his horse altogether and sat still in the saddle looking about him; three things that he loved dearly, clear sunshine, pure salt air, and intense quiet beguiled him into forgetting for a few seconds his deep anxieties.

The atmosphere had that peculiar mellow quality of soft light found only in the Low Countries; the trees were motionless, and their leaves hung clear cut from the graceful branches in burning hues of crimson, gold, and brown; wreaths and twists of fallen leaves lay in the damp cold grass, and fine brittle twigs scattered over the hard paths where the frost had made little glittering ridges; the sky was blue, but blue hazed in gold; a large piece of water reflected the polished trunks of beeches patched with moss, the twisting red roots of brambles, and the foxy colour of broken ferns; two swans moved slowly along this lake, and the water was in sluggish ripples against their dead white breasts; their feet seemed to stir with difficulty, and they left a clear track behind, which showed that a thin breath of frost had passed over the water, dulling the surface.

The man on the horse noticed this, and it brought him back to what was ever rolling in his thoughts. If this sign of an early and severe winter was made good, he would have the less to fear for the United Provinces, since they were almost impossible to invade in the depth of snow and ice. This was one reason in his choosing this season for his expedition. As he watched the two silent swans and the film of frost they displaced, his whole face changed with the intensity of his thought; he straightened in the saddle and clutched the reins tightly in his thickly gloved hands; before the frosts had ceased and the waters were running free in spring he would deal with France on equal terms or be dead in the endeavour.

Heated by the wave of inner exaltation that shook him he lightly touched his great grey horse and took the avenue at a gallop, drew rein at the villa steps, and blew a little whistle he carried. When the groom came he dismounted, and entering the private garden by the door in the wall to the right of the house walked slowly to the covered alley where he had promised to meet M. D'Avaux.

The garden had the same stillness as the wood; the late chilled roses hung motionless on their stems, the curious agave plants and Italian laurels were stiff against the wall, a deep border of St. Michael's daisies showed a hard colour of purple about the three steps of the sundial and the flat basin where the fat carp shook golden gleams under the curling withering water-lily leaves.

As the Prince turned into the walk at the end of the garden, shaded overhead with ilex trees and edged with a glossy border of box, he saw the Frenchman pacing the sunless path.

William touched his hat and the Ambassador bowed. The Prince's sharp glance detected that he was something out of countenance.

"I wonder, M. D'Avaux, what you can have to say to me."

"Yet Your Highness is well able to guess," de Avaux answered, with the air of a compliment.

William looked at him again; he detested all Frenchmen, and since the day when, a grave child of eleven and a state prisoner, he had sat sternly in his coach in the Voorhout, and refused to yield precedence to M. D'Èstrees, he had especially hated the French envoys to the States, who had always been, in the truest sense, his enemies; the only thing that softened him to M. D'Avaux was that diplomat's cleverness. The Prince, who loved a worthy antagonist, admired him for his real wit and skill in the long and bitter game that had been played between them; nevertheless, there was, in the full bright glance he cast on him, a quality that his antagonist did not mistake.

"I fear," added the Ambassador, "that I do not find Your Highness very well disposed towards me."

"This is matter of business, is it not, Monsieur?" answered the Prince. "When you have opened your subject I will discover my disposition to it."

They were walking up and down the long walk; the thick gold sunshine slipped through the ilex branches and flickered on the Frenchman's black satins and the Prince's heavy fur-edged cloak. M. D'Avaux held his hat in his hand, but the Prince still wore his brown beaver.

"I am very sorry," said the Frenchman, in his quiet, pleasant manner, but with obvious indication of the concern he was under, "that I have had so few opportunities of assuring you in what esteem my master holdeth Your Highness——"

William made no reply.

"These are no idle words," continued M. D'Avaux, fingering the black curls of his peruke on his breast. "Despite all unfortunate differences, His Majesty hath, as all Europe, a great admiration for the courage, wisdom, and address of Your Highness——"

"Is it not rather late for these compliments, M. D'Avaux?"

"There is an object in them, Monseigneur," answered the Ambassador; "for in consequence of the feeling of His Majesty to Your Highness I am speaking to you now instead of to the States."

"Ah," said William. He switched at the box hedge with his short riding-whip. "Do you not, Monsieur, consider myself and the States as one?"

"History, Monseigneur, showeth that the House of Orange and the United Provinces have not always been of the same sentiments and design."

"They are so, however, now, Monsieur," answered the Prince dryly; "and

whatever your business, you may put it before myself or the States, whichever you choose."

M. D'Avaux bit his lip; he read in William's curt words a reminder that he was absolute with the States and more confident than ever of his power over them; he was nettled into a colder tone.

"Yet I think that Your Highness would rather hear me than let me take my message to Their High Mightinesses."

William coughed. His cloak was fur-lined, but he constantly shivered; the shade, even of a September day, was hateful to him.

"Come into the sun," he said, and turned out of the alley into the clear-lit garden. They walked slowly towards the sundial and the carp basin, M. D'Avaux prodding the hard gravel with his cane and the Prince with his switch under his arm.

"Well, your business," said William calmly.

"Monseigneur," replied M. D'Avaux, with sincerity and some earnestness, "I think that you are embarked on a dangerous enterprise."

"The French say so," answered the Prince. "I have been told of the most extraordinary reports in your gazettes and pamphlets."

"I do not obtain my information from gazettes and pamphlets, Your Highness," answered the Ambassador firmly, "but from more reliable sources."

William paused by the carp pond and the bed of violet daisies.

"What is your information?" he asked.

"The last which Your Highness would wish in the hands of France."

"You seem to think, Monsieur," said William, with the shadow of a smile, "that I am an enemy of His Majesty."

He was not looking at the Frenchman, but down at the bed of daisies that he stirred gently with his whip as he spoke. M. D'Avaux looked sharply at his haughty aquiline profile, and answered with a quickening of the breath—

"His Majesty cannot forget what you said at your table a year ago, Monseigneur. You said, Your Highness, when you heard that His Majesty had seized and dismantled Orange on the claim of the House of Longueville, that you would teach him what it was to insult a Prince of Orange, and you refused to retract or explain the words."

"His Majesty," replied William, "hath neither retracted nor explained the deed."

"Your Highness has often repeated those words."

The Prince lifted his brilliant eyes.

"I shall repeat them again, Monsieur," he said, in his strained low voice, "and again until I obtain satisfaction."

He saw that M. D'Avaux had made the allusion to humiliate him, and

though there was no sign of it in his countenance the shaft had told, for the insulting seizure of his personal princely apanage, for which he had been powerless to avenge himself, had been the hardest to bear of all the insolences of France, and the revenues had been a real loss.

"You see," bowed M. D'Avaux, "that we have some reason to believe Your Highness the enemy of France."

The Prince continued to look at him steadily.

"His Christian Majesty is very interested in my affairs," he said.

"It is the affairs of King James," returned the Frenchman, with some grandeur, "that my master is interested in——"

"How doth that touch the States?"

"It toucheth Your Highness, for we believe that you make preparations to lead an armament against His Britannic Majesty."

William lowered his eyes almost disdainfully.

"I perceive," he said, "that you do get your information from the gazettes after all——"

"No," answered M. D'Avaux softly. "I will tell Your Highness where I get my information. You know of one Verace, of Geneva?"

The Prince's whip still stirred leisurely among the daisies.

"He was steward once to the Princess and dismissed."

"As early as August, Monseigneur, this Verace wrote to M. Skelton giving information of the intrigues of Your Highness, the Princess, and M. Bentinck."

He watched the effect of his shaft, but the Prince was unmoved.

"You might as well quote the gazettes, Monsieur," he said.

"These letters, Your Highness, were sent by M. Skelton to my Lord Sunderland," replied M. D'Avaux, "and he took no heed of them—we have reason to believe that they never reached the King."

William answered dryly—

"None of this is very interesting, Monsieur. You have had the assurances of M. Van Citters in London, of M. Castagnana, King James himself is content, M. D'Albeville is content, and it is not for France to take this part of interfering on the information of cast-off servants."

"I have had other news from Rome," said M. D'Avaux coldly, "of the intrigues of Your Highness with the Vatican. Your Highness, methinks, knoweth something of some letters which went in to the Pope in a basket of wax fruit."

William gave him a quick glance.

"Take these advices to the court of England, which they concern, Monsieur."

"Your Highness is very well aware that all the foreign intelligence that goeth to England is under the control of M. de Sunderland—who is your very good friend."

The Prince faintly smiled.

"I thought M. de Sunderland was believed the very good friend of France."

"He may," said M. D'Avaux, rather hotly, "deceive M. Barillon, but he doth not deceive me."

"It is unfortunate," remarked the Prince, "that you are not Ambassador to London. I think your abilities wasted here, Monsieur."

"I thank Your Highness." He bowed grandly. "Such as my talents are, I find scope for them at The Hague—I only regret that my confrère is no longer M. Skelton."

He said this knowing that Mr. Skelton was detested by the Prince, who had made his residence in Holland unendurable to him. The dislike was returned by the Englishman, who was the close ally of M. D'Avaux in the attempt to expose and ruin the plans of William. William, however, had triumphed in ousting Skelton from The Hague, and his successor, D'Albeville, was, as M. D'Avaux knew to his vexation, a mean creature that no one could long depend on.

"Mr. Skelton," said the Prince, "is no doubt extremely useful in Paris. And I must ask you, Monsieur, to let me know the true object of this audience, which was not, I think, to discuss these puerile rumours."

The Frenchman flushed; he had always found the Prince difficult to come to conclusions with. William had a short, flashing way of scorn, an inscrutable calm, that even now, when, in his certain knowledge of the Prince's intended enterprise, M. D'Avaux felt he had the upper hand, was difficult to face.

M. D'Avaux felt himself, as always, confused and heated; he believed that the Prince was laughing at him and at France, and a wave of anger shook him both against the supine James who would not be roused, and his own government who would not credit half the information he sent home. He tried that dry directness which his opponent employed with such effect.

"Your Highness will scarcely deny that you intend a descent on England?"

"I should," answered William, "be a fool if I did not deny it when asked by you, Monsieur."

M. D'Avaux thrust his cane into the crevices of the stone pedestal of the sundial.

"Whatever Your Highness may say—I know."

"Ah!" answered William, "but can you prove?"

"To the satisfaction of my own intelligence, Monseigneur," said M. D'Avaux vigorously. "You cannot suppose that I have been unobservant as to your measures since the beginning of the year."

William kept his eyes fixed on the carp sluggishly moving round the fountain basin.

"It would interest me, M. D'Avaux," he said, "to hear what you have discov-

ered of these measures of mine."

"You shall hear, Monseigneur." The Frenchman spoke as one spurred and goaded. "For one thing, I know that you obtained four million guilden from the States for repairing the fortifications of Brabant—that this money was to be payable in four years, and you have raised it in one. Your Highness hath the money, and the forts are untouched."

William was silent.

"Another public fund of equal value you have diverted from its proper use; you have farmed out the revenues of the Admiralty, and this, with your own great fortune, maketh Your Highness master of a huge treasure—apart from the money you are constantly raising among the French and English refugees. For what purpose is all this wealth intended?"

"You say you know," replied William, without looking up. "And, my faith, what kind of an answer can you expect from me?"

"Your Highness can give no good reason."

"None of any sort, to you, on any part of my conduct," said the Prince coldly. "You already overstep your province."

Pale, but firm, M. D'Avaux stood his ground.

"I do not overstep my duty to my master if I ask why Your Highness persuaded the States to build forty new ships of war, and secretly added twelve by your own authority—why these ships were sent publicly to remote stations and secretly brought back—why a great army is encamped at Nymwegen—why M. Bentinck is so continually closeted with the Elector and Your Highness with the States, the German Princes, the Landgrave of Hesse and M. Castagnana—why seven thousand Swedish mercenaries have been hired, and a huge number of Dutch soldiers and sailors secretly raised and privately drilled?"

The Prince turned his back to the sundial, so that he faced the Ambassador; his hands, clasped behind him, held his riding-whip; his face was inscrutable.

"Well, what else?" he asked dryly.

"Only this, that Your Highness and your creatures may deceive the King of England into thinking it is against Denmark and the Corsairs that all these preparations are being made, but you cannot so deceive the King of France."

"And yet," returned the Prince, "I thought His Majesty gave but a cold attention to your alarms."

This, accompanied by a pointed smile, told M. D'Avaux that William was quite well aware that it had not been so easy to rouse Louis to a sense of his danger. The Frenchman bit his lip; he had a master-stroke in reserve.

"Your Highness is a very able Prince," he said, on an oblique line of attack, "but my master pays well and is well served. I know who, under so many different names and pretences, purchaseth and hireth transport boats in so many different

ports; I know who ordereth the bakers of Amsterdam to make biscuit, the saddlers to make bridles and saddles—why all the artillery is leaving the towns and coming down to the coasts—why magazines of hay are waiting in all the seaports, and why English noblemen are living furtively at The Hague."

He paused and looked narrowly at the Stadtholder, who, he was confident, must be taken aback at this knowledge of his plans; but the Prince was so immovable that the wild thought occurred to M. D'Avaux—is it really Denmark or his own country, as King James contends?

"I cannot conceive why you come to me with this," said William.

"To warn you, Monseigneur."

"Of what?" flashed the Prince.

"Of France," answered M. D'Avaux impressively.

William drew a deep breath.

"You should know better than to seek to frighten me, M. D'Avaux. I am not by nature timorous."

"I warn Your Highness," repeated the Ambassador. "I remind you that you are not a sovereign Prince."

"I rule a sovereign state, Monsieur."

"The first magistrate of a republic, Monseigneur, cannot behave as a king. Since Your Highness will give me no satisfaction, I shall go to the States."

"You will do as you wish," answered William; "but you are, nevertheless, perfectly well aware that I rule the States."

M. D'Avaux bowed.

"Give me credit for that discernment—the card I play is not an appeal from Your Highness to the States——"

"What then?"

The Frenchman moved a little farther back, still in a courtier's attitude, with his hat in his hand, looking intently at the Prince, who stood on the steps of the sundial with the violet daisies brushing his cloak and boots.

"Mr. Skelton hath prevailed on M. de Louvois to command me to say to the States that there is such friendship between His Majesty and King James that any attack on Britain would be regarded in the same light as an attack on France. That," added M. D'Avaux softly, "may make the States see their interests as different from those of Your Highness."

William gave not the least sign of surprise or confusion.

"So it is Mr. Skelton's advice to endeavour to frighten the States?" he remarked.

"I shall deliver my message to-morrow," said M. D'Avaux, "and then Your Highness will see if the States are prepared for an attack—an instant attack on

their frontiers—if they are prepared to allow you and their whole strength to leave a country which France is menacing. You saved the Provinces in '72—without you they could not save themselves now——"

"You must follow out your instructions, Monsieur," said the Prince.

He stepped down from the sundial and looked narrowly at the Ambassador.

"You have nothing more to say?" he added.

"Nothing, Monseigneur, unless Your Highness can give me the assurances I was bid to ask——"

"What would be the use of that, Monsieur, when you know, as you say," returned the Stadtholder.

M. D'Avaux was slightly baffled; he thought that the Prince must betray more concern unless he had some counter-stroke to this of the threat to the States.

He answered with dignity—

"Then I need trouble Your Highness no further."

"Very well," answered William. "I am sorry that you have wasted your time, Monsieur; but I always was of a tolerably positive disposition, and difficult to turn."

"All Europe knoweth that," answered M. D'Avaux, with a little flush; for the Prince's words were an obvious assertion of the fact that he would not alter his plans for any French threats—an obvious challenge.

They walked down the hard gravel path between the beds of late roses. At the garden gate the Prince parted from M. D'Avaux with that simplicity which was his natural manner, but generally credited to him for guile.

"I am obliged to you for this courtesy," he said. "Au revoir, Monsieur."

"I thank Your Highness," answered M. D'Avaux, with a grand bow.

The Prince closed the gate on him, and went instantly into the house by the back entrance. And so straight to his private room, where a little company, consisting of M. Fagel, M. Bentinck, M. Dyckfelt, the envoy of M. Castagnana, Governor of the Spanish Netherlands, the envoy of the Elector of Hanover, a Prince of Lunenburgh, and the Landgrave of Hesse were awaiting him.

They all rose at his entrance. He came swiftly and breathlessly to the table, flung off his hat, and said—

"Gentlemen, M. D'Avaux knoweth everything—that villain D'Albeville hath betrayed us. There is a bomb to be dropped to-morrow that is like to blast us all."

CHAPTER X

THE ENGLISH AMBASSADOR

"M. D'Albeville?" echoed the Landgrave.

"It can be none other, Highness," answered William, with energy. "No one else was privy to my Lord Sunderland his part——"

M. Fagel gave a quick exclamation.

"He knoweth that?"

"Yes—he scenteth it," said the Stadtholder grimly. "And he hath a pretty idea of the preparations, only he doth not guess either their magnitude nor their forwardness."

He seated himself, and the others took their places again. There was, in the whole assembly, a breathless air of expectation and excitement. The room was full of steady mellow sunshine, which brought out every detail of the persons of the gentlemen about the walnut table and glimmered in the fair hair of M. de Lunenburgh, who sat facing the window.

The Stadtholder glanced round these intent faces and took off his gloves, unclasped his cloak, and said, in a passionate voice, directly addressing the Grand Pensionary—

"M. Fagel, the design is to frighten the States, by declaring that any design against England will at once provoke France into an attack on the Provinces."

M. Fagel was silent. This stroke was unexpected and tremendous. If Louis fell on the frontiers of the States, Their High Mightinesses would certainly not permit the Prince and the army to sail for England.

"You know my opinion," continued William, looking at the Spaniard, "that if M. de Castagnana can but keep Ostend, Mons, and Namur till the spring, I shall then have settled this English business, and be able to return with a sufficient force to drive the French out of Flanders."

"I think," said M. Fagel, "that the States would not take the risks, and this threat from France will have a very ill effect among the common people."

"And," added M. Dyckfelt, who had primary charge of English affairs, "if M. D'Avaux and M. Skelton succeed in undeceiving King James as to the true design of M. de Sunderland that would be a shrewd blow——"

"One which shall not be delivered," said the Prince firmly. "M. de Sunderland is the one man who can keep the foreign intelligence from the King, and he stayeth in office. M. D'Albeville is a dirty tool, but there is more use to be got out of him——"

"But he, Your Highness, you say hath betrayed us?" questioned M. de Hesse.

”And now he can betray them,” said William. ”By Heaven, Highness, do you think we, at this stage of our endeavours, shall trip over an insect like this D’Albeville?”

He finished his sentence with a smile at M. de Hesse. He was himself of a German House, a German Prince and a Grandee of the Holy Empire, and had alway an affection for and a powerful influence over the Landgraves, Electors, and Princes who made up the German confederacy.

M. de Hesse responded—

”We are, as ever, ready to do what Your Highness thinketh fit in this juncture.”

”Ah!” answered William warmly. ”I should do ill to fail with such friends——”

”Should we not,” asked M. Bentinck, ”consult with some of the English at The Hague?”

”No,” said the Stadtholder firmly. ”They have none of them any conception of continental affairs, and at present are engaged in disputing over the form of the Declaration, for they seem already to be split into very decided parties.”

M. Fagel and M. Dyckfelt both considered it a mistake not to more fully trust the English nobles, but both were aware that the Prince’s distrust of that nation (but too well founded on experience) was not to be shaken.

The German Princes and Ministers were willing enough to keep the threads of the coalition as much as possible in their own hands, and none of them could believe that a youth like Lord Shrewsbury and an eccentric rake like Lord Mordaunt could be of use in serious counsels.

The envoy of the Elector of Hanover proceeded to lay before William the plans for the fortifications of the Rhine which the Germans had agreed to defend with troops, replacing those withdrawn by the States, in the same way as M. de Castagnana had engaged to fortify the frontier of Brabant on the side of Flanders.

William surveyed the plans and listened to the explanations, in which the Landgrave and M. de Lunenburgh eagerly joined, with an elated satisfaction which even the stroke about to be dealt by M. D’Avaux could not destroy. His spirits, as ever, rose with increasing difficulties and dangers, and after having to listen to the thousand, to him, paltry arguments of the English party leaders, this talk of the real heart of affairs, the hand-to-hand grips with France, had a ringing pleasure for his ears.

M. Fagel, withdrawn into the window embrasure, was speaking with William Bentinck, a tall, fair, and handsome man, of a quiet dignity, a few years older than the Stadtholder, and that Prince’s closest friend, of the probable effect of this move planned by the wit and watchfulness of Mr. Skelton and M.

D'Avaux, when an usher entered to inform His Highness that the English Ambassador requested an immediate audience.

William was roused at once from his maps and papers, and a movement of excitement silenced the low, serious voices.

"M. D'Albeville!" exclaimed the Stadtholder. His eyes flashed, and he rose. "Conduct him here."

As the usher left, all looked at the Prince.

"Why should he come?" asked M. de Lunenburgh.

William laid his hand affectionately on the German's brown velvet sleeve.

"My child," he said softly, "whatever he hath come for, we will turn him to our own uses."

At this moment the English Ambassador entered, amid an absolute silence; he paused on the threshold and glanced at the men before him: the Stadtholder between M. de Lunenburgh, the Landgrave and the Hanoverian envoy at the opposite side of the dark circular walnut table; the Spaniard, very splendid in gold brocade that caught the sun, standing with his back to the hearth, and opposite him in the dazzling length of the window M. Bentinck with the two Dutch ministers.

So were gathered in this small, plain room representatives of the most of the members of the huge coalition which the formidable Stadtholder had laboured so long to combine against France; and M. D'Albeville, standing for England, equally precious both to these allies and to Louis, instinctively drew back a little, as one who has stepped among silent enemies.

He was a slight Irishman, and had been handsome, but dissipation, poverty, and meanness had given him a haggard and livid appearance; he wore gaudy, but tarnished, finery, and a huge red-brown peruke that hung in knots of heavy curls either side his sharp face.

"I desired a private audience, Highness," he said, speaking in perfect French.

"We are private here, M. le Marquis," answered William, handing the packet of papers back to M. de Hesse. "And we are glad that you have come, for we had business to discuss with you."

He seated himself at that, and M. D'Albeville came to the opposite side of the table, so directly facing him; the others remained standing.

"You," said William, with energy, "have been trying to fool me, M. le Marquis. You have seen fit to convey warnings to the court of England and to M. D'Avaux."

The look of fear that was never quite absent from the Irishman's face deepened; he seemed to shrink into his stiff buckram and brocade clothes.

"So God help me——" he began.

"Oh, enough of your oaths!" cried the Prince, in a sudden burst of fury. "Do

you think I have time to listen to your cursed excuses? How much have you told that damned Frenchman?"

So direct, terrible, and sincere was his passion that the object of it retreated towards the door, and even the spectators were awed.

"I protest," answered the Ambassador, dry-lipped, "I have told nothing. I have sent reassuring messages to His Majesty, as Your Highness knoweth——"

"Were you not well enough paid for them," demanded William fiercely, "that you must go cry your wares in the French market?"

"Monseigneur, you are misinformed——"

The Prince cut him short.

"M. D'Avaux hath been told of M. de Sunderland's part—you told him. Hath King James been warned also?"

"I came to tell Your Highness so," stammered M. D'Albeville. "Not by me, God knoweth; but I had this morning a message——"

"From whom?"

"Not from my Lord Sunderland—*direct from His Majesty* bidding me ask the States the reason of the preparations of Your Highness——"

The Stadtholder glanced at his friends; he was still taut with passion. Dealing with mean creatures such as this roused that rare fury in him that brought him out of himself.

"So now you are afraid, eh?" he asked. "You are not quite so sure which is the winning side, M. le Marquis——"

M. D'Albeville came nearer the table. Another fear conquered his fear of the terrible Prince.

"I cannot go on," he said feverishly. "I dare not. I can help you no more, Monsieur. I must deliver that message, and I must tell the King everything——"

"You will deliver the message," interrupted William grimly; "but you will not open the eyes of His Majesty until I bid you."

The Irishman clutched his hand on his breast, with a contortion of terror and despair on his face. He had been playing fast and loose between France and Holland so long that he scarcely knew how far he had betrayed one to the other, only that of late he had kept the greater faith with the Prince, who terrorized him, as did all the English envoys, except those he won by friendship, such as Temple and Sidney.

M. D'Albeville was now convinced that, in view of the coming French action, the Prince could not succeed, and he wished fervently that he was before James or Louis that he might gain a good price by telling what he knew of William's plans. He already regretted having come before His Highness, yet he had not dared act without warning him, and had been in some hopes of persuading him of his own faith and use.

Disappointed in this, he groaned aloud, began a feeble sentence that died on his lips, and cast a furtive glance for a way of escape.

This did not fail of notice by the Prince.

"Bentinck," he said, "look to the door."

That nobleman stepped quietly in front of it, and the wretched Ambassador shrilled a protest.

"Doth Your Highness intend violence?"

"I intend to make use of you, Monsieur!" cried the Prince. "We are men in earnest. Do you think that we should allow you to in any way incommode us?"

"It will be Tower Hill for me!" cried M. D'Albeville. "I dare keep silent no longer—if my Lord President goeth, what protection have I got?"

"M. de Sunderland shall not go until I have sailed from Helvoetsluys," said William. "How much hath M. D'Avaux promised you for telling everything to the Court of St. James?"

M. D'Albeville shrugged, but obviously brightened as the talk changed to money.

"You are quite mistaken, Your Highness——"

"How much was it?" interrupted William.

"Naturally, if I could help M. D'Avaux—I should expect some consideration for the trouble——"

The Prince for a moment took his great eyes from the Irishman and addressed a rapid sentence in Dutch to M. Dyckfelt, who at once went to the Chinese bureau at the side of the fireplace and unlocked a drawer.

"I must deliver the message to the States," said M. D'Albeville, between cringing and defiance. He was really afraid of what might have happened in England—Sunderland might be in disgrace, and the whole intrigue discovered by James, for all he knew.

"It is my wish that you should," answered William. "It will come very pat with M. D'Avaux *his* message."

M. Dyckfelt put on the table a gold standish, a sheet of paper, and a casket, which last the Prince kept before himself.

"M. le Marquis," he said, "you will do me one more service—you will write to His Majesty that his suspicions are quite unfounded, that my preparations, you are assured, are against Denmark, and that no credit is to be given to the tales of M. Skelton and M. D'Avaux about M. de Sunderland."

The Ambassador's face became absolutely blanched; he moistened his lips, and murmured, "I dare not—I dare not," between dry breaths.

"You dare not refuse," answered William. "I could so expose you that not a court in Europe would employ you. Besides, it is enough that I command you. Sit down and write."

M. D'Albeville came slowly nearer the table.

"I would do anything to serve Your Highness, but not this—it is too late—it has gone too far——"

"Write," said the Stadtholder briefly. "I pay well, you know that."

M. D'Albeville sat down in the chair opposite the paper and standish.

"But His Majesty will learn from others, and I shall be recalled and" ... he complained miserably ... "death ... treason is death. Oh, my God, I cannot do——"

"M. le Marquis," interrupted William, "His Majesty is simple enough to trust you, and for the rest I protect those whom I use."

M. D'Albeville shivered and took up the pen. He had, and knew it, no chance with the Prince, whose potent personality always completely mastered his. He dared not, from some sheer unnameable fear, refuse or resist, but the damp stood on his brow and his heart was cramped at the thought of the possible vengeance of the master whom he was betraying.

"You know what to write," said William. "Put it in your own hand and your own style—you do not, I think, use cipher——"

Tears of terror, rage, and mortification stood in the Irishman's eyes. He had come to excuse himself from a service that had become too dangerous, and found himself overpowered into going still greater lengths. He could not bring himself to write the letter which would eventually cut him off from all hope of pardon from England.

"He shall write," said the Prince, in a low tone, to M. de Hesse, "if I have to hold a pistol to his head the while."

And he came softly round behind the Ambassador's chair.

"Gentlemen," complained M. D'Albeville, "is this a way to treat the representative of His Britannic Majesty?"

The Landgrave and M. de Lunenburgh closed nearer round him.

M. D'Albeville looked up at the grave faces bent on him, and began to write.

"Make haste," said the Prince, drawing a round filigree watch from his pocket and glancing at the time.

The Ambassador groaned and drove his pen the faster; in a few moments the sheet of paper was covered, sanded, and signed.

"There is my ruin, Highness," said M. D'Albeville dramatically, handing it with shaking fingers.

"Men like you are never ruined," returned the Prince. He glanced over the letter, ill spelt, ill expressed, but all that Sunderland would need to quiet the fears of his master.

The Prince folded it across, and M. D'Albeville held out his hand.

"By your leave, M. le Marquis, I will post this." William opened the cas-

ket M. Dyckfelt had brought from the Chinese bureau, and took out a couple of little linen bags, which he slid along the table towards the crumpled figure of the Ambassador; the glint of gold could be seen between the wide meshes. "The audience is over," he added dryly.

M. D'Albeville got to his feet and began to pick up the money and thrust it into the huge flap pockets of his silver-branched coat, making the while little sounds of protest, and shaking his head dismally.

"Listen," said the Prince vigorously. "You will give your message to the States to-morrow, and you will send no letters of any kind to England until I request you to——"

"I am always the servant of Your Highness," said M. D'Albeville with a dreary submission, yet with a kind of satisfaction in the bribe that lay heavy in his pockets; the Prince always paid better than M. D'Avaux, kept short by M. de Louvois, who disliked him.

"All packets leaving our ports are watched," remarked William. "So do not try to send any secret messages to England."

The Ambassador picked up his white-plumed hat, that had fallen to the floor, then came towards the Prince with a humble gesture, as if he would have kissed his hand; but William drew back with a haughty disgust that brought a blush even to M. D'Albeville's brazen cheek. He withdrew backwards, M. Bentinck opened the door for him, and closed it after he had departed, bowing.

"By Heaven!" burst out the Landgrave, "to think that a great nation should send as representative such a rascal!"

"His Majesty hath always been unlucky, Highness," answered William, "in the gentlemen he sendeth to The Hague. To use such tools!" he added impatiently; "but I think we have checkmated M. D'Avaux.—M. Fagel," he turned swiftly to the Grand Pensionary, "you see your part? The two messages will come the same day, and you are to protest that there must be some secret alliance between France and England that the States have been kept in the dark about, and that we can give no answer till that is explained; you must feign alarm which will further inflame the people against France and her designs, and so we may provoke King James into repudiating the French alliance and offending His Christian Majesty."

Having thus indicated the policy that his genius had instantly conceived, he paused with a little cough, then laughed, which he seldom did save when he had discomfited some one. He laughed now, thinking of M. D'Avaux, and there was a malicious note in it that would not have pleased that diplomat to hear.

The German princes laughed also, in a more good-natured fashion, and the whole company moved from their places with a sense that a final resolve had been reached.

”Come, gentlemen,” said the Prince in his tired voice, ”I think we have earned our dinner.”

He handed to M. Fagel the letter written by M. D’Albeville.

CHAPTER XI
THREE PAWNS

Three English gentlemen were walking slowly round the Vyverburg on the side where stand the spacious courts of the Buitenhof; the ground beneath their feet was thickly covered with dry yellow leaves, and the trees above their heads almost bare, but the sun shone as strong as summer on the placid surface of the water, and gleamed with a red fire in the rows of long windows of the Government buildings; the sky was a great luminous space of blue gold, against which the trees and houses the other side of the lake showed with a tender clarity, like the pictures of that great artist, Ver Meer of Delft.

There were swans and ducks on the lake; they, like the water on which they swam, were touched with this universal hue of gold, and seemed to be cleaving a way through glimmering mists of sunshine.

The three gentlemen paused by one of the posts protecting the edge of the water; it was near evening, and under the calm was the sense of a little rising wind, salt from the sea. Not a word was spoken between these three who had fallen from much talk to idleness; all had the same subject in their minds, though each coloured it with his own temperament; all of them were remarkable-looking men, and typical of some aspect of the great movement of which they formed a part.

The eldest was a man still in his prime, red-haired and tanned to an unnatural darkness, with something stern, sad, and passionate in his face, and an abruptness in his movements; he wore the splendid appointments of a soldier; across his shoulder was twisted a rich oriental scarf of coloured silk and gold threads; his name was Fletcher of Saltoun, a noble Scot, who had returned from the Turkish war to assist in the enterprise of the Stadtholder.

The second was a youth of singular sweetness of expression and delicacy of feature, plainly dressed in grey; the charm of his appearance was marred solely by a black silk patch which he wore over his left eye; he was staring at the water with a melancholy air, and now and then sighed; this was Charles Talbot, eleventh Earl

of Shrewsbury, dismissed last year from the army and the Lord-Lieutenancy of Staffordshire for refusing to abjure his religion; he had mortgaged his estates for £40,000, which was now at the Bank of Amsterdam at the service of the Prince. He was for the moment but one of the many refugees at The Hague.

The third was by far the most remarkable, and bore most signs of greatness: young, though a little older than the Earl, he was not, perhaps, half the height, being hunch-shouldered to a deformity, and thin and meagre in body; his face, livid and lined with disease, wore a sparkling expression of energy, his eyes, large, noble, and ever changing in expression with a kind of restless animation, scorn, impatience, and dare-devilry; even now, when standing still, he thrummed with his fingers on the railing and whistled 'Lillibulero' under his breath.

He was that Lord Mordaunt whose fiery, careless courage had urged this expedition on the Prince a year ago.

Fretting under the languor and idleness engendered by the beautiful late afternoon and the serene fair prospect, he proceeded to lead his companions out of the silence to which they were so obviously inclined.

"Where will the Prince land, eh, my lord?" he asked of Shrewsbury. "In the south-west or the north-east?"

He knew that my lord could not know what was not yet decided, but the question served to break the pause.

"Why, 'tis even what they argue about," answered the Earl. "Lord Dunblaine was with His Highness yesterday, and gave as his father's advice that we should choose the north, because 'tis so easy to obtain horses in Yorkshire——"

"Or because my Lord Danby," sneered Mordaunt, "hath such a pull in that county that he hopeth to get His Highness into his hands."

"The Prince is very secret," said Mr. Fletcher.

"He listeneth to all and agreeth with none," answered my Lord Mordaunt.

"He might be more open," complained the Earl, who of the three was most in the favour of William; but Mordaunt perhaps understood the Prince better.

"Dr. Burnet is to draw up the letter to the Church," remarked Mr. Fletcher. "I ever disliked him."

"He is translating the Prince his Declaration also," said the Earl discontentedly. "I do hope the Prince will not be led by such an extreme Low Churchman——"

"M. Fagel wrote it," answered Mordaunt. "His Highness said the English were all such party men he would not trust them to prepare it. He is himself writing the letter to the army—you have heard? He is clever with the pen."

"He may," broke out Mr. Fletcher, "trust Dr. Burnet as much as he pleaseth; but if he is to put his confidence in my Lord Danby we are as good as lost——"

"Better my Lord Danby than my Lord Sunderland," interrupted Shrews-

bury; ”it surpriseth me that he can deal with such a knave.”

Lord Mordaunt gave an impatient pirouette.

”Why is there all this delay—delay?” he cried, ”*I* would have sailed months ago!”

Mr. Fletcher roused at that. He was innocent enough in the matter of politics to have been one of those who accompanied, with hope of success, Lord Monmouth on his fatal expedition, and to consider the Prince’s attempt as such another enterprise.

”You are right,” he said gloomily. ”The King will get wind of it, and Dartmouth will have his ships spread all round the coast to prevent a landing.”

”I am sick of The Hague—sick!” exclaimed Mordaunt impetuously. ”If His Highness don’t leave the cursed place soon, I’ll go without him!”

Shrewsbury laughed, then Mordaunt himself good-humouredly; Mr. Fletcher stared at the slow-sailing ducks. He did not care much what happened, but he hated inaction, and began to regret the Turks who had provided it.

”You have heard that Skelton hath been recalled and lodged in the Tower?” asked Mordaunt.

”Yes,” said Shrewsbury; ”it was in the letters this morning. It might have been expected after His Majesty’s denial of a French alliance and reprimand to M. Barillon.”

”Sure bad policy,” said Mr. Fletcher, but without enthusiasm, ”and a good stroke for the Prince.”

In truth none of these gentlemen guessed what a stroke. James had actually stepped into the trap laid for him, and, seeing how great an advantage the appearance of an alliance between him and France gave the States, had angrily repudiated the suggestion, and haughtily reprimanded M. Barillon for French interference with his affairs. Sunderland, prepared by the Prince, had urged him on to this course, and the letters of M. D’Albeville had served to back the Lord-President’s reassurances. The Prince had been triumphant in this encounter, the States and the people were warmer in his cause than ever after this proof, as they took it, of a connection, between France and England, dangerous to themselves. M. D’Avaux, since the disgrace of Skelton, was silent with mortification, and a kind of lull hung over Europe; William was looking with a terrible anxiety towards Flanders, where Louis had his troops threatening the frontiers of the Spanish Lowlands, and so the United Provinces. What would Louis do now the King of England had rejected his warnings and refused his aid? On the answer to that question the fate of Protestant Europe depended.

But these three knew and cared little of these matters; their minds were set wholly on the domestic policies of England, and occupied with a vague ideal of liberty for their own faith and their country’s laws, not unmingled with some

desire for vengeance on the party now upper-most.

"I saw Sir James Stair to-day," said Mr. Fletcher suddenly; "he hath come from Leyden to join the Prince. I suppose he will take to himself the affairs of Scotland."

"Nay," answered the Earl; "the Prince is all for William Carstares, a poor, mean Scottish minister; but, sir, more in the Prince his confidence than any of us——"

"Carstares," cried Mordaunt, with flashing eyes, "hath been under torture with secrets of M. Fagel in his keeping, and never betrayed them. A brave man!"

Shrewsbury shrugged his shoulders delicately.

"I wish we sailed to-morrow," said Fletcher of Saltoun.

The restless Mordaunt moved on, and the others sauntered beside him.

"The boats are all creeping down to the sea laden with arms," he said excitedly. "They lie thick as pebbles among the reeds of the islands of the Rhine and Meure. Sirs, ye should see them."

"I had the Prince his command to stay at The Hague," answered Shrewsbury. "Saw you these boats?"

"That I did, and pontoons, and transports, and the hay slung in ropes in the ports, and the great trains of artillery..."

They were walking towards the Gevangenpoort, the prison gate which rose up by the side of the Vyver. The hazy sky was changing to a tawny colour behind the dark roof lines of the houses, flushed here and there with gold and a stain of purple; little pale, shell-coloured clouds floated away to the uppermost heights of heaven where the clear blue was still untouched, and the water began to glow and burn with the reflected fires of the sky.

The clear chimes of the Groote Kerk struck the hour, and the sound of oncoming horsemen caused the few passers-by to pause before entering the narrow way of the prison arch.

A cavalcade came into sight from the direction of the Stadhuis, and moved at a swift trot towards the Gevangenpoort—a number of gentlemen, with two riding before the others.

As they passed every hat was removed.

"The Prince returning from Helvoet," said Lord Mordaunt, and the three uncovered as the horsemen approached.

The Stadtholder was mounted on a huge grey Flemish horse, and on his right hand rode the Maréchal de Schomberg, still erect and magnificent; the two were talking with a certain stiff courtesy; behind them came the Spanish envoy, M. Zuylestein, M. Zolms, and M. Auverqueverque, together with a number of Dutch and German nobles.

The Prince saw the three Englishmen and saluted very graciously; the set-

ting sun was for a moment full on his grave face, then he passed through the prison arch, and the company clattered over the cobbles out of sight.

"No Englishman with him, mark you," said Mr. Fletcher.

"Mr. Herbert told me that he *could* not be open with us," replied Shrewsbury.

"Yet Herbert is to have the command of the expedition, is he not?"

"They say so; but he is full of discontent. Admiral Evertgen hath spoken against him to the Prince, methinks."

Mr. Fletcher saluted one of his countrymen whom he had recognized, and the three turned back.

A steady dusk was descending, extinguishing the colours in the sky, in the water, in the windows of the Binnenhof, and blurring those in the dresses of the people passing to and fro; only the trees and the houses retained their distinctness and sharpness of outline, and they took on a marvellous colour of living silver grey. Long deep shadows blended with the water the beautiful irregular buildings that had been the theatre of so many great events; the swans stood out, a dead white, from hues rapidly darkening and mysterious; their feathers were ruffled by a long breeze that swept chilly from the sea and salt dunes at Scheveningen.

A yellow light sprang up in one of the lower windows of the Binnenhof, and cast reflections far beneath it in the water.

"Did you ever hear the story of John de Witt, the late Grand Pensionary?" asked Shrewsbury, pulling his cloak about him. "M. Bentinck told me, and kept me out of bed with the tale——"

"Why should you think of that now?" asked Mordaunt curiously.

"You see that light there—the first to be lit in the Binnenhof?—that was his room, and M. Bentinck said that always when one passed late one would see that candle shine and know that M. de Witt was still waking."

"He got a poor reward," said Mr. Fletcher. "He was torn to bits on the Plaats, was he not?"

"Anyone whose memory goeth back sixteen years will give you an account of it," answered my Lord Mordaunt dryly. "I wish I had been beside M. de Witt that day with a sword in my hand!"

The Earl sighed.

"How cold it bloweth! A severe winter is presaged, do you not think, my lord?" he said. Then abruptly: "Why should good men meet such ends?"

Lord Mordaunt laughed.

"You ask me to explain ingratitude? By Heaven, I have not the wit for the task."

"Ingratitude!" frowned Shrewsbury; "but these people love the Prince because he hath done them great services——"

”But shall we?” interrupted Mordaunt. ”Ah, sir, I think the Prince will meet the same spirit as did John de Witt, should he ever rule in England——”

”Why, God forbid!” exclaimed Mr. Fletcher.

”What?” demanded Mordaunt sharply—”that we should ever be ungrateful?”

”No; that His Highness should ever rule in Britain.”

Lord Mordaunt answered with some intensity—

”Are you so simple, sir, as to think we can have a man like that among us *not* ruling us?”

Lord Shrewsbury was doubtfully silent. His timorous nature had been startled by the sudden action into which circumstances had spurred it. A sense of loyalty, a terror of underhand methods, a dread of anything so violent as a revolution made him already secretly regret the part he had so far played so well.

Mr. Fletcher answered carelessly and thoughtlessly—

”You set too high a value on the little Prince. His life is not worth a year’s purchase.”

Lord Mordaunt flashed an extraordinary look over the fine person of the speaker, and the comely youth of the Earl. His thin hand clutched on to his sword-belt, and his haggard face flushed.

”You set too high a value on bone and muscle!” he cried, with a passionate sneer. ”You are jolly fellows, both of you; but who will remember you when you have been dead a year? But men,” he added with a terrible energy, ”will talk of the Prince of Orange, and of me.”

They stared at him, amazed at this outburst, and Shrewsbury, seeing what a frail, deformed creature he was, blushed with a kind of shame.

”Good God!” said Mr. Fletcher, ”I am not working for fame, my lord.”

”No!” flashed Lord Mordaunt; ”creatures of clay—of clay! Prettily coloured, but a breath of the fire that burneth in the little plain vessels would crack you in a day.”

He gave a flourishing bow, and walked off towards the Stadhuis.

”An Eccentric,” remarked Mr. Fletcher, looking after him.

”I fear so. He will put himself into a passion at a word; but he would pledge his whole fortune for you if you were in need of it,” answered the Earl. ”How suddenly dark it is; let us, sir, go home.”

CHAPTER XII

FRANCE MOVES AGAIN

It was mid-October; the Prince's preparations were complete, even to the putting of the horses on board, and yet there was silence from France. A terrible lull of suspense hushed the United Provinces, and of all the anxious hearts there was none so anxious as that of the man who had staked this great wager—the Stadtholder.

On this day, the nineteenth of the month, he returned from the camp at Nymwegen, where he had been reviewing the troops long since secretly raised and drilled by him, and now sanctioned by the States, entered The Hague privately, and rode to the Binnenhof, where he was closeted with M. Fagel, who gave him the last assurances that all opposition, even from the Republican or Loeventein party, was extinct.

When he left the Grand Pensionary and came out into the still corridors of the Binnenhof, he stood thoughtfully for a moment, at the head of the staircase, thinking of the various threads, all so different in texture, that he had almost succeeded in weaving into the completed pattern of his design.

His own country, the German princes, the Empire, Spain, Sweden, England, the Pope—all combined at last with one aim, to answer the aggressions of France.

For ten years, ever since the Peace of Nymwegen had been forced on him, he had been working through gloom, disappointment, discouragement, for this end. His answer to the revocation of the Nantz edict and the seizure of Orange had been the League of Augsburg, which was now bearing fruit, and all Europe was directed against France.

Toil, energy, courage, patience, and genius were telling. The young disinherited Prince, who had been treated as a mere pawn by Charles and Louis, the general of twenty-two with a miserable army, who had been offered humiliating terms by the French, insolently victorious, had slowly grown to be a power that both Bourbon and Stewart feared, and whose influence was predominant over the larger half of the Continent.

His rapid thoughts went back over the years to those black days of blood and despair when he had been put at the head of his country's fortunes and trusted with her sole hopes. Defeat—disappointment had often been his in his struggle to maintain the position of the States in Europe, but even to his own judgment, and he ranked his own achievements low, it seemed that success had waited on all his apparent failures, for his country was not only free but great, and he not only independent but powerful.

Slowly he began to descend the stairs, which were full of a misty sunlight.

When he reached the first landing-place a man stepped from one of the tall doors, and, seeing the Prince, bowed and stood very respectfully waiting for him to pass.

William paused, came to a stop, and regarded this man with a close, keen scrutiny.

He stood so still that the object of his gaze lifted surprised eyes, and the two looked at each other.

The Prince stood at the bottom of the flight of stairs, one hand resting on the polished newel post. He was in buff military attire and carried over his right arm a heavy dark cloak; he wore a black beaver that shaded his brow, but the rich light was full on his face, which expressed a strong emotion sternly contained.

Behind him a blue and green tapestry hung on the dark wall; it showed a sea fight with curious ships and curling waves, and banners rising through smoke; the sun showed every thread in it—every crease, and the latent gold in the heavy chestnut locks of the Prince.

"M. Heinsius," he said softly.

"Your Highness?"

The Prince did not change his position nor move his brilliant gaze.

"I think to leave the States very soon, as you know, Mynheer; you know also under what circumstances." He paused a second, then added: "I have your good wishes, Mynheer?"

Antoon Heinsius coloured from chin to brow. He had been of the Loeventein party and in favour of France, but his policy had changed lately to an adherence to the Stadtholder; he had not expected this to be remarked by William.

"Every true heart in Holland," he answered strongly, "must pray for the success of Your Highness."

William descended to the landing-place and laid his frail hand, half concealed in embroidered linen ruffles, on the sleeve of M. Heinsius.

"You are the kind of man I want. M. Fagel is old and in failing health—he needeth help," he said. "You are a patriot; you would, I think, do anything for the States."

The words were poor compared to the fire and energy in the Stadtholder's strained but steady voice, and the purpose in the gentle firm touch of his hand on the other man's arm.

M. Antoon Heinsius answered instantly, with a deepening of the colour in his fine handsome face—

"Your Highness doth me exceeding honour."

"I am never better pleased," said William, "than when I can make a man like you my friend."

"Your friend—your servant, Highness," murmured M. Heinsius. He was considerably moved by this kindness from one usually so stately and reserved,

and one whom he had of late, as he understood his policy better, warmly admired.

"You know my aims, my plans of government," continued the Stadtholder; "you will know what to do in my absence,—by serving Holland you serve more than Holland."

M. Heinsius answered earnestly—

"Before God I will do my best."

"Your best is well worth having, Mynheer. I have noticed your career."

The two men, but a little time since in opposition, looked with complete understanding into each other's eyes. The Prince had won the fine loyalty of M. Heinsius as he won all whom he set himself to gain, as he won ultimately, indeed, all those who served him and came to know him intimately.

"The States have acted to the wishes of Your Highness?" asked M. Heinsius.

"The States have trusted me," answered the Prince. "Even the Loeventein faction are eager for me to depart on this expedition, in the hopes, maybe"—he smiled—"that I shall be slain or affronted. But I have anxieties."

He paused and looked at the water of the Vyverberg that lay glinting with autumn gold beneath the window.

"Mynheer," he added, "a country is a high stake—one's own country. Mynheer," he looked again into the face of the older man, "you have perhaps thought there was some wantonness in this my resolve, you have thought that I may have dared too much in offering to take beyond seas all the defences of the States."

"Never!" answered M. Heinsius firmly. "I understand and I applaud the policy of Your Highness."

"It is," said the Stadtholder, "on a sure bottom and to be justified. Yet, until I know what France doth, I am no better than a man on the rack."

"You think—even now?"

"Even now—if they were to fall on the frontier! Nought there but the Spaniards! But a little while will show us."

He paused again, then said, weighing his words, and with a strange mingling of simplicity and dignity.

"I am no King in this country, Mynheer, but the servant of the Republic, and you, who are a knowing man and one who hath the common welfare at heart, I would have hold me justified in this I do. I have been believed ambitious, but my ambition is one with the good of the States, and God knoweth that I do not take this tremendous risk from any such paltry motive, but because it is our chance, which if we do not take we are as good as lost."

"It is no flattery to say that I agree with Your Highness, who seeth farther and more clearly than most men."

”You will hear them,” answered William, ”talk of England, and what I do to gain England, and how much store I set by that country. Be not deceived; England is but a counter in the game I play, and, if I succeed, will be but one of many allies which we will lead against France. And always with me, Mynheer Heinsius, it is the Republic—always.”

He spoke with intensity and emotion that were the more moving in contrast to his usual sternness.

”The deeds of Your Highness have proved your words,” answered Antoon Heinsius in an unsteady voice.

The Stadtholder sighed.

”I will not disguise from you that my sufferings are terrible—my disquietude almost unbearable, for it is the Republic at stake,” he said.

He gave his hand to M. Heinsius, who kissed it very lowly, and left the Binnenhof.

He had not so much as a footboy in attendance, and rode rapidly to the ’huis ten bosch’ with little regard for the salutes and respectful homage of those he passed. His contemplated enterprise, the very daring of which, owing to his usual caution, was the more awe-inspiring, made him even more than ever an object of admiration and attention at The Hague.

Once within the bounds of his own woods he was enwrapped in the gracious loveliness of the trees—the quiet of the frost-bound earth, and had almost reached the house before he met anyone; then, round the turn of the long main avenue came a lady, very gracefully riding a white horse.

The Prince gave her a quick glance, touched his beaver, and was passing with no slacking of his pace, but she drew rein and said in a faint voice—

”Your Highness——” with a little gesture that seemed to entreat him to stay.

He turned his horse instantly.

”I am leaving The Hague, sir,” she said, speaking English, which was obviously her native tongue. ”I have the permission of Her Highness to go see my sister who is sadly worse.”

She was young, very slender, and carried herself with a certain air of fire and pride, a certain poise of dignity and animation charming to behold; her features were ordinary, but vivacious and intelligent; there was a certain set or cast in her brown eyes not unattractive, and her hair, in a hundred gleaming hues of gold, red, and deep honey colour, hung in thick curls on to her riding coat, cut like a man’s and thickly embroidered with gold.

”Madame Bentinck is worse?” repeated William in a quick distress.

”They did say so. I felt I should go.”

”I am grieved a thousand times,” he added, ”and for M. Bentinck”—he spoke with real feeling, but with that touch of constraint (unlike his usual reserve)

which marked her manner to him—"and for you, Madam."

Miss Villiers hesitated a second, then said abruptly—

"I did not think to meet you. I shall not see you again before you sail. Take my poor wishes with you."

"I have been so bold as to feel sure of them," he answered gravely. She was silent, but he did not ride on, but sat with slack reins looking at her, half in the thick autumn sunlight, half in the shade of the close tree trunks, for the sun was sinking.

They had not spoken to each other alone for years; but when she had first come to The Hague with his wife there had been a swift attraction between them, which, for all her discretion and his reserve, had not failed to be seized upon by the English agents to work discords in the Court of The Hague. It was not so long ago that the Princess's Chaplain, Dr. Covell, and Miss Trelawney, had been dismissed by Mary for inventing and spreading this kind of gossip for the benefit of those spies of the English Court who were ever endeavouring to estrange the Prince from his wife.

The Stadtholder was sensitive to these malicious scandals. He rather avoided Miss Villiers, who, on her part, was utterly indifferent to report and, secure in the position the marriage of her sister to M. Bentinck gave her, troubled herself not in the least either about Mary's gentle dislike or her own unpopularity in The Hague. She had great gifts—wit and courage and understanding, enthusiasm and self-control; she was very reserved, no one knew her well, not the Prince now, though once he had had her inspiring friendship, her brilliant advice, her ardent attention; she was still of service to him, but always through the medium of her sister and M. Bentinck. It was strange to both of them to come face to face like this in those woods in which, near ten years ago, they had walked together, and he had told her of his hopes and fears previous, and just after the Peace of Nymwegen.

He smiled and she frowned; each wondered how much that friendship had been worth to the other; Miss Villiers thought that she had long been balanced with his wife in his affections; he, that she had never considered him as more than the embodiment of a policy that she admired—both were wrong.

"Tell me," she said suddenly, "are you still in fears of the French?"

"The greatest fears. Until I know how they are going to move I consider the whole plan in jeopardy. If they should march on the frontiers——"

"God forbid!" she exclaimed fervently. "When will you know?"

"I am utterly in the dark."

"I shall not sleep until you have safely sailed," she said. "For what is to become of England if this faileth?"

"It must not fail," he answered quietly.

Miss Villiers looked at him strangely.

”No,” she remarked; ”I do not think you will fail—in the end.”

She lowered her eyes, patted the strong arched neck of her horse, and added—

”I have seen my Lord Shrewsbury and my Lord Manchester, and laboured to strengthen them in your cause.” She smiled. ”They are discontented already.”

”Does it matter?” asked William.

”A vast deal. You must, sir, try to please the English more; they do not love you.”

”Then I cannot make them.”

She raised her eyes again.

”Perhaps you do not quite understand us—the English—though you have known a many by now——”

”I do not even understand you, Madam,” he answered, ”save that you have done great services to the cause I stand for, and for that,” he added earnestly, ”you must not think me ungrateful. Some day I may be able to share prosperity with my friends.”

He said the last sentence with a warmth yet a simplicity wholly charming. Miss Villiers paled and averted her eyes.

”What use is my advice!” she exclaimed bitterly. ”What use am I!”

He looked in surprise at this sudden alteration in her even demeanour.

”It hath been of use to us,” he said gravely. ”And what you say now is just, and I will remember it——”

Miss Villiers suddenly laughed.

”Yes; you must be very civil, sir, to the English, and—you must never trust them!”

She touched up her horse.

”Sure I will not detain Your Highness——”

He took off his hat.

”I have writ to M. Bentinck,” he said earnestly; ”but tell him yourself what a great concern I am under as to your sister her health—and that he must send a messenger with news.”

Elizabeth Villiers bent her head, smiled rather sadly, and they parted; he towards the house at the end of the long avenue, and she through gold-red glittering woods into the hazy autumn distance.

When he reached the steps of his villa he saw another woman awaiting him—the Princess, standing in the full last light, with a light cloak about her. As soon as she beheld his approach she came forward, and was at his stirrup before he had dismounted.

”There is a galloper from Flanders with news,” she said; her voice was

strained, and she clasped her hands tightly together to steady them.

A broken exclamation escaped the Prince.

"If the French are marching on the frontiers I cannot go!"

The grooms came forward and took his great horse; he sprang from the saddle and went with the Princess up the shallow sun-flooded steps.

"Oh, my dear!" cried Mary under her breath, "if there are ill advices——"

He pressed her hand fiercely.

"I cannot leave the country if they are invading Flanders——"

In the simple vestibule was the impatient messenger—a young Spanish officer, who went, very courtly, on one knee when the Prince entered, and handed a packet from M. de Castagnana.

"News of the French?" demanded William swiftly.

"I do believe so, Highness."

The Stadtholder broke open the dispatch, glanced down the close lines of Spanish, and turned instantly to his pale wife, whose eyes were fixed on him with a piteous intensity.

"The French have abandoned Flanders!" he cried; "their troops are pouring into Germany—the States are safe, thank God! thank God——"

CHAPTER XIII
THE GREAT ENTERPRISE

All difficulties were overcome. Louis, angry at the English King's rejection of his advices, and perhaps hoping that his great enemy would run on disaster in his audacious undertaking, or perhaps believing that it was now too late in the year for any such expedition, had suddenly diverted his troops into Germany, where in a few days he had taken every fort along the Rhine; successes celebrated with great pomp in Paris, but worthless indeed to Louis should William accomplish what he was now free to attempt, and bring England out of her shackles into the alliance against France.

The Prince's preparations were complete; his Declaration had been published and circulated in England by the arts of his friends, his ships and troops were ready, even to the embarking of the soldiery, and he himself had to-day taken his farewell audience of the States; for now the south-west wind had changed, and the great fleet gathered at Goree was free to sail.

Mary, in the chilly autumn garden of the 'huis ten bosch,' waited his return. Four times a day she went to public prayers, but not all her ardent faith could quell the tumult in her soul; her anxieties were not to be repressed, even at the communion table, which added to her distress, her self-reproach, her uneasiness.

She walked up and down the bare alleys, the hard gravel paths, with a quick step, between the newly-turned flower-beds, the late yellowing plants, and stiff evergreens.

The violet St. Michael's daisies were brown and withered on their stems, the last roses had fallen, and the carp been removed from the fish basin, where the water lay frost-bound under a thin covering of ice; there was no sun to cast a shadow from the finger of the grey sundial, and the sky was obscured with low, floating, changing clouds; a little wind brought the salt pure air from the sea-coast and stirred Mary's bright locks inside her miniver hood.

As she was pacing her most familiar and beloved walk, the little alley at the end of the garden, sheltered by interlacing trees now bare, the sound of a footstep brought her to turn with a glad expectancy.

But it was not the Prince, only M. Auverqueverque, a noble who had long been his friend, and who had saved his life amid the bloody steppes of St. Denis, and for this reason always high in Mary's regard.

"Do you come from the States, sir?" she asked wistfully, speaking in English, for her Dutch was still very indifferent, and she was shy of using it save on a necessity.

"Yes, Madam, and I left His Highness conversing with M. Fagel and M. Heinsius."

The Princess stood still. Her loose velvet coat, of a bright blue colour, served to accentuate the pallor of her face, which was worn and strained in expression; her eyes were reddened with recent weeping, and narrowed with a look of trouble.

"There was no opposition to him—now, I think," she said, with a sudden smile.

"Madam—none; there was great enthusiasm and great grief at the going of His Highness," answered M. Auverqueverque warmly. "He alone was unmoved—I would you could have heard his words, Madam—'I have had no thought,' he said, 'since I did undertake this position I hold, save for the good of the States, and I do take God to witness that, if I have erred, it hath been because I am human, and not through lack of affection for, or care of, this country. Now, going to make the endeavour to be of service to our common faith, I do commend to your care and guardianship all that I hold dear—these States and my wife'—and at this they were stirred to tears, Madam, for there was not one who could not remember what he had brought them through."

Mary was silent; she pressed her handkerchief to her lips and looked towards the house. M. Auverqueverque regarded her tenderly.

”The States professed great devotion to Your Highness,” he said, ”and spoke from their hearts.”

”I do thank you,” she answered, in a very low tone. ”Will you not come into the house?”

He followed her across the bare garden, and there was nothing said between them, each being deeply engaged with different thoughts on the same subject.

As they neared the villa, one of the gentlemen of the Princess’s household came to meet them and acquainted Mary that a lady who besought her charity implored her for an immediate audience.

The Princess was well used to these applications. Out of her meagre allowance she contrived to greatly assuage the sufferings of the distressed refugees at The Hague, and this liberality of hers being known, she received more petitions than she could at all comply with, which was a source of great distress to her gentle heart.

”Alas!” she said; ”I have already a great list of persons unsatisfied, and worthy cases, too; but it is more than I dare put before His Highness in this present juncture——”

”This seemeth, Your Highness, a gentlewoman of the better sort, English, and most earnest for speech with you.”

”I can but see her,” answered Mary quickly. ”Only I trust she will not raise her hopes of what I can do for her. M. Auverqueverque, forgive me.”

With a little curtsy to that gentleman she entered the house.

”Where is this gentlewoman?”

In her withdrawing room, she was told, and there Mary proceeded, without ceremony, still wearing her cloak.

The small but handsome room held a pleasant sense of comfort in contrast to the dead grey weather without. A great log fire cast a glittering light over the dark furniture, and in the full glow of it stood a tall lady wrapped in a crimson mantle that half disclosed an embroidered sacque, and wearing, twisted round her head and shoulders, a fine Eastern scarf embroidered in many colours; she was much older than Mary, and looked fatigued to illness; her large fair eyes were heavily shadowed and her mouth strained, but her appearance was one of great beauty.

When the Princess entered she made a little deprecating, half-expectant movement forward, as if hoping for recognition; but she was utterly strange to Mary, who looked at her in some embarrassment, seeing at once that this was no ordinary supplicant.

The strange lady gazed at her sadly.

”Ten years have changed you to beauty and me to age, Highness,” she said, in a voice of singular sweetness. ”You have forgotten me. And I should scarcely have known Your Highness.”

”Indeed,” answered Mary, a little bewildered, ”I cannot recall you. But I do perceive that you are my countrywoman; perhaps I knew you at Whitehall?”

”It was there we met, Madam,—and of late we have corresponded——”

”Why, who are you, Madam?”

The elder lady cast herself to her knees before the Princess, and answered with some wildness—

”I am the unfortunate wife of my Lord Sunderland!”

”My Lady Sunderland! Madam, you must not kneel. Oh, what hath passed in England to bring you here?”

Mary impetuously raised the Countess, who kissed her hands in a kind of frantic entreaty.

”Where is the Earl?” cried Mary, with a flush of agitation.

”He hath fled,” whispered Lady Sunderland, ”to Amsterdam, where he is in hiding. We have lost everything—everything; his life was in danger; there was no man in all the ministry hated like my lord——”

The painful colour burnt in Mary’s cheek.

”His Majesty discovered—the intrigues—with us?” she asked.

”No—else it had been Tower Hill; but the Catholics undermined him—my lord could not hold his own—he was dismissed all his offices, and when the Prince his Declaration was spread abroad, there rose such a spirit in the nation that we were no longer safe, and while we could, we fled.”

Mary took a quick step across the room and laid her trembling hand on Lady Sunderland’s arm.

”The King—knoweth?” she asked.

”The last dispatch of M. D’Albeville told him, and he was struck silent with dismay.”

”Alas! alas!” was wrung from Mary, ”that this should have had to be! It is my father, Madam, and I do a bitter thing against him——”

She sank into the great walnut chair by the fire, and the ready tears overbrimmed and ran down her white cheeks.

”Your Highness hath a patriotic public duty to perform,” said Lady Sunderland. ”And must not think of this——”

”No,” answered Mary unsteadily, ”no;” she stretched out her hand and drew the other woman towards her; ”but you—you have taken a strange part, my lady——”

”My lord,” said the Countess earnestly, ”hath served His Highness to his

own extreme peril, and now I am come to plead a pardon for him from you——"

"But you yourself," urged Mary; "what have you felt towards these affairs?"

She rose, still holding the fluttering hand of Lady Sunderland, and looked steadily into her eyes.

"I have done as my lord directed," was the answer. "I have served him all my life. I shall serve him—always."

Mary dropped her hand. The thought that stirred her was that she could not judge, since that same unquestioning devotion ruled her life too.

"My lord his services," she said faintly, "are not such as the Prince can with honour reward."

"Nor," answered my lady with some pride, "such as he can with honour ignore——"

"He is apostate," said Mary; "that cannot be forgiven."

"It can be pardoned."

"What would you, Madam? The Earl is no subject of the Prince."

"He is his supplicant—as I am; he might have gone to France, but he hath put himself at the mercy of His Highness."

"The Prince is ever generous," answered Mary, "but what he can do here I know not."

She drew away a little from the Countess, for in her thoughts were rising the remembrances of all the ignoble parts my lord had played, and the ill reports she had received of him and his wife from her sister, the Princess Anne.

"You must see the Prince," she said, something coldly.

Lady Sunderland was quick to notice this change of manner.

"I am a woman in bitter trouble," she answered. "I stand before you no better than a beggar. If it were not that I might still be of use to my lord, I would pray to die."

"You are very weary," said Mary, with instant kindness. She drew her to seat herself on the long brocade couch—"Poor soul, I doubt that you are very sad!"

Lady Sunderland looked at her wildly, then burst into anguished tears.

"Ah, Madam!" cried Mary, bending over her, "I do beseech you take comfort."

The Countess kept her face hidden, and her bowed shoulders heaved.

"Nothing shall happen to the Earl, I dare swear."

Lady Sunderland looked up.

"Forgive me. I have not wept for so long. My son, my eldest son, is recently dead in Paris in an obscure duel—I hoped so much from him—once. Dead! Indeed I know not what I say."

Mary shuddered. She recalled the Lady Sunderland of former days—

brilliant, ambitious, superbly happy—a woman she herself had looked up to with a half awe as a personification of all the allurement of that splendid life she had left so early; she thought of all the unscrupulous intrigues, bargains, deceits, buyings and sellings this lady had helped her shameless husband with; the extraordinary double game they had played so long and successfully. But looking at this, the sudden end, penniless, bereaved exile, she felt no scorn, only a great pity; for the Countess had been faithful, and Mary thought that a great virtue in a woman.

"I did not know that of Lord Spencer," she said gently. "I am very sorry; it is sad for you."

The Countess dried her eyes swiftly.

"I do not know why I should weep for him," she answered half fiercely; "he went near to break my heart. He was what they call worthless."

She paused, and Mary stood silent; she was not unaware that the sharpest prick to Lord Sunderland's magnificence had ever been that poor useless rake, his son, nor ignorant of the Countess's long endeavour to make some show before the world in this matter, and now that broken pride opened its heart to her, a stranger, the sadness of it held her mute.

Lady Sunderland's wet strained eyes looked past the fireglow to the bare boughs and cloudy heavens framed in the tall window.

"It is much better that he is gone," she continued. "Yet—last night I went on the deck of the packet and it was all so dark and cold, not a star, and the waves sounding, but not to be seen, and I remembered how little he was once, and how warm in my arms, and then methought he was somewhere crying for me in the chill blackness ... abroad—in a poor lodging with no friend."

She wrung her hands together with irrepressible horror.

"My God!" she cried, "there's a way to die!"

Mary caught her arm.

"You must not think of it like that; there is another side to it—God is very merciful, I know nothing—but in heaven there is great pity for all of us."

The Countess turned and stared at her a moment, with her handkerchief to her lips, then said unsteadily—

"I never meant to speak like this—but Your Highness is so gentle——"

Mary smiled.

"I must carry you to my Lady Argyll, Lady Balcarres that was, who is here with her daughters——"

She turned swiftly, for the door opened, and a familiar voice behind her said eagerly her name—"Marie, Marie——"

It was the Prince; as he entered he paused, seeing the Countess, who had instantly risen.

"Lady Sunderland!" he exclaimed, before Mary could speak, and stood

amazed.

They had last seen each other on the occasion of the Prince's last visit to England, and though he knew her at once he found her considerably changed.

"The Earl hath fallen?" he added swiftly.

Lady Sunderland was mistress of herself immediately on his appearance. By force of her long training she fell into the same manner she would have used to him at Whitehall or Windsor; she gave him a great courtly curtsy.

"The Earl is a refugee at Amsterdam, Your Highness," she said, "and I am here beseeching charity."

"Ah." William drew a quick breath. "I thought my lord was safe enough—the King discovered him?"

"No, sir, the Catholics unseated him."

The Prince crossed slowly to the fire.

"So," he said slowly—"well, Madam, the Earl is safe in Amsterdam, and the Princess will make you welcome."

A flush of reviving hope kindled the refugee's pale cheek.

"We are assured of the gracious protection of Your Highness?" she asked ardently.

"My lord hath done me considerable service," answered William. "But, Madam, he is not loved by those English I have about me now." He smiled dryly. "Yet, if he will lie quiet awhile—I am not ungrateful——"

"It is all we ask," said Lady Sunderland warmly. "My lord wisheth only to live in quiet obscurity unless he can serve Your Highness—some way——"

William gave her a keen look.

"I hardly think," he answered, "that M. de Sunderland is fitted for quiet obscurity—but perhaps he will endure it a little while. I leave for Helvoetsluys to-morrow."

"God bless this noble enterprise Your Highness hath on hand!" cried the Countess fervently. "Could you see the crowds waiting outside Whitehall and a-studying the weather-cock and praying for a Protestant wind you would be heartened further in your daring!"

The Prince took a swift look at his wife, who stood with averted face by the window.

"The King—how took he the news?" he asked.

"I heard that he was all bewildered (being then deeply engaged in the Cologne dispute and thinking nothing of this, like a man besotted) and would not part with the Declaration of Your Highness, but carried it about with him re-reading it—then he called the bishops to ask if they had put their hands to the invitation, and they gave him no—after which he made all manner of concessions, like one in a panic fear——"

”Concessions?” interrupted the Prince.

”Sir, he gave back the charter to the city with due solemnity, and their privileges to the fellows of Oxford and Cambridge, and there was held an inquiry into the birth of the Prince of Wales—all of which but wasted the dignity of His Majesty and brought more ridicule than respect—for all are equally eager for Your Highness, and these concessions come too late.”

”Too late, indeed,” said William quietly. ”I hope this week to be in England. How came you across, Madam? I have stopped the packet service lest they carry too sure advices of what we do here——”

Lady Sunderland smiled sadly.

”In a little owler, sir, we slipped off from Margate sands, and the weather was so terrible we were like to have been whelmed by the overtopping waves; yet we gained Maaslandsluys, and from there my lord went on to Amsterdam——”

”He was wise,” said the Prince, ”not to come to The Hague.”

Lady Sunderland looked at Mary, who had stood motionless so long.

”Your Highness—may I not retire? I have taken too much of your time——”

The Princess turned about with a little start.

”Where are you lodging?” she asked.

”With one Madame de Marsac—known, I think, to Your Highness——”

”You must stay with me,” answered Mary warmly, yet with a curious absent air of distraction. ”I will take you to the other English ladies——”

She looked at her husband.

”I shall come back,” she said. He gave a little nod which cut short the graceful gratitude of the Countess, and the two ladies left.

Now he was alone he seated himself near to the fire with that air of utter fatigue that was like apathy and seemed at times, when he was out of the sight of men, to overwhelm his great spirit.

He sat quite still, gazing into the fire from under drooping lids, and when Mary softly returned he did not move.

She slipped behind his chair and took the stool the opposite side of the hearth; she had put off her cloak; the firelight touched her brown dress and brown hair to a beautiful ruby warmth and gave a false rosiness to her pale face.

”I am grieved for Lady Sunderland,” she said.

The Prince answered absently.

”Ah yes—I believe she is a knave like him—but they are clever, and he at least hath some root of patriotism in him.”

”Yet I am sorry that you must use such people.”

He made no reply, but continued to gaze sadly and sternly into the fire.

Mary gave a little shudder.

”I cannot believe that to-morrow we go to Helvoetsluys——”

Her voice broke, and she steadied it hastily.

”The States are coming also, are they not, to see your departure?”

”They are paying me that compliment,” he answered indifferently.

”What chance will your poor wife have to speak to you then—amid that pomp——”

He sat up and looked at her with instant attention.

”Have you something that you wish to say to me, Marie?”

”Yes,” she said earnestly. ”I do desire to ask you—for your own sake—to see that no harm happeneth to—my father.”

Now she had spoken she sat very pale and distressed, but fixing him with her soft brown eyes ardently.

He flushed, and seemed much moved.

”That you should need to ask——” he began, then checked himself. ”I promise,” he said.

”For your own dear sake,” she cried, ”forgive me for speaking of this—but let people know you would not have him hurt——”

He gazed at her intently.

”This is hard for you,” he replied. ”I could not go without your sanction and your help——”

He broke off again. Speech, which had always seemed inadequate to him, now seemed to merely travesty his feelings.

She too was silent; she had lowered her eyes and seemed to be thinking deeply. The Prince studied her with an almost painful intensity.

She was so lovely, so gracious, so sweet, so high souled ... he remembered how he had disliked and despised her, treated her with neglect, then indifference, made no effort to please or win her; and yet she, during the ten years of their marriage, had never from the first failed in obedience, sweetness, self-abnegation, nor once faltered from a passionate devotion to his interests, an unchanging belief in him, and now, for him, she was doing violence to her own heart and setting herself in active opposition against her father, a tremendous thing for such a nature to bring itself to. As he gazed at her fair youth, pale with anxiety for him, he felt she was the greatest triumph of his life, and her love an undeserved miracle.

And there came to his mind a certain conversation that he had had with Sir William Temple in a sunny garden at Nymwegen before his marriage. He remembered that the Englishman had smiled at his scornful talk of the Princess, and had said—”Do not despise good women because there are so many of them——”

Mary suddenly moved and rose. The sun had parted the loose clouds and a fine ray fell through the tall window and shone in her bright hair and satin skirt.

His thoughts were scattered by her movement; he rose also.

She smiled at him.

"How kind you are to me," she said, trembling, and very low.

"Dear God!" he exclaimed softly, as if he was mocked. "In what way?"

"In giving me so much more of your company of late," answered Mary simply.

The Prince looked at her strangely.

"Women are wonderful," he said humbly.

CHAPTER XIV
STORMS

The long sand-dunes about the village of Scheveningen were covered with spectators to the number of several thousands, comprising nearly the entire population of The Hague, several strangers, refugees from other parts of Holland, and many French, German, and English; they were principally women, children, and old men, or those in the sober attire of merchants, clerks, servants, or shopkeepers.

One single object seemed to animate these people; they were all utterly silent, and all directed their gaze in one direction—that of the sea.

There, covering the entire sweep of water and obscuring the great horizon itself, rode that huge armament which contained the whole strength of the Republic, and on which was staked her hopes and her safety.

This fleet had weighed anchor during the stillness of the previous night; a few hours after the wind had turned to the south and so brought all the ships on the north coast, where, for half a day, they had been in full view of The Hague.

The weather was still and warm, the sky a sunny blue, and the long stretches of the dunes touched from their usual greyness to a gold look. Towards afternoon a fine mist rose shimmering from the sea and gave a curious unreal flatness to the naval pageantry, as if it was some magnificent vision painted between sea and sky.

Without speaking, save in short whispers to each other, without moving, save to change their places by a few steps, the people continued to gaze at the gorgeous spectacle, the like of which no living man had been able to see before.

There were no less than sixty-five great ships of wars, splendid vessels ris-

ing high above the waves, with much gold on them, seventy vessels of burden in attendance on them and five hundred transports.

These ships carried five thousand cavalry and ten thousand infantry of the magnificent Dutch army, the six British regiments in the employ of the States, the French Protestants formed into a regiment by the Prince after the Edict of Nantz was revoked, and the whole artillery of every town in the Republic, which had been left stripped of all defences save twelve ships of war and the German troops on the Rhine frontier.

The immobile, silent effect of this great and terrible fleet, spreading for miles and representing the entire strength of a vast maritime power, making little progress and waiting for the wind, wrought a kind of exaltation in the hearts of the spectators, all of whom felt their fortunes dependent on the success of this enterprise, and most of whom had friends and relations on board, or in England, whose lives were now at the hazard.

But no dread of personal loss or discomfiture, no fear for those dear to them, could equal the grand swell of pride the Dutch felt at beholding the magnificence of the Republic they had built up out of blood and tears, the power of the Religion they had preserved through perils and agonies inconceivable, and which had now grown, from a little feeble spark, to a torch to illume half the world.

The dangers to which they were exposed, the chances of attack from a powerful enemy while their defences were abroad courting the fortune of war and the hazard of the winds and sea, the fact that their artillery was gone and their frontier was on one side in the possession of their enemies and on the other but protected by German mercenaries, could not check the sense of glory that stirred them as they watched the changing leagues of ships, so near, yet so silent and beyond communication.

The exiles, French and English, gazed with more sullen feelings; but while no national pride was thrilled in their bosoms, the thought of their former wrongs and suffering and the anticipation of their speedy avenging made them no less fiercely wish success to those spreading sails wooing the wind for England. And there was one foreigner, who loved Holland as her own country, and whose heart beat with a pride and a terror as intense as that which inspired any of the Dutch.

This was the wife of the Stadtholder, who had yesterday returned from Helvoetsluys. She had been above two hours riding up and down the sands watching the slow passing of the fleet; in her company were the English ladies, the Countesses of Sunderland and Argyll and some of her own attendants; she had been very silent, and, now, as the afternoon was fading, she touched up her beast and galloped away from all of them along the dunes.

She reined her black horse at a higher point where some sparse poplar trees, stunted, leafless, and tufts of crackling grass grew out of the dry white sand, and

looked round at the great sweep of sea covered with ships and the great curve of shore covered with people.

Then her glance returned to the object where it had rested since she first rode down to Scheveningen, the blue flag hanging heavily above the ”Brill,” the ship in which the Prince sailed.

Amid all the crossed lines of mighty masts, intricate cordage, and strained sails she had never failed to distinguish, now in sun, now in shade, sometimes lifted by the breeze, sometimes slack, this standard, though she was very short-sighted, and much clear to the other spectators was a blur to her. When she used her perspective glass she could sometimes read the legend on this flag, which was the motto of the House of Orange with the ellipsis filled in—”I will maintain the liberties of England and the Protestant Religion.”

Mary rode out farther along the dunes, the crisp sand flying from her horse’s feet. She was a fine horsewoman, and had dropped the reins on her saddle to hold her glass. The wind was keen on her face and swept back the long curls from her ears and fluttered the white plume in her beaver. Though she was near so vast a multitude no human sound disturbed the clear stillness; there was only the long beat of the surf on the smooth wet sand and an occasional cry of some pearl-coloured sea-bird as he flashed across the golden grey.

In Mary’s heart all terror, remorse, sadness had been absorbed by strong pride; the doubts, shames, fears that had tortured her were gone; she did not think of her father, of her danger, of her loneliness, only that she, of all the women there, was the beloved wife of the man who led this—a nation’s strength—into war for that cause which to her was the holiest of all causes, the new liberty against the ancient tyranny, tolerance against oppression—all that she symbolized by the word Protestantism.

She was so absorbed in this ecstasy of pride and enthusiasm at the sight on which she gazed that she started considerably to hear a voice close beside her say—

”Is it not a magnificent spectacle, Madam?” Mary turned quickly and saw a plainly dressed lady on a poor hired beast riding close up to her. Solitude was dear to the Princess, but to rebuke an advance was impossible to her nature.

”Are you from The Hague?” she asked gently.

”Yes, Madam, I came there yesterday.”

She was English, and obviously did not know Mary, who was moved by something pitifully eager and wistful in her worn thin face and stooping figure.

”You are belike one of the English exiles?” she suggested kindly.

The other opened out at once with a glow of gratitude at the interest.

”My husband was an officer in the Staffordshire, Madam, and we had no money but his pay, so when he refused to abjure there was nothing for us but

exile."

Mary pointed to the fleet.

"He—your husband—is there?"

"Yes—the Prince gave him a pair of colours in one of the English regiments."

"You should be proud," smiled Mary.

She answered simply—

"I am very proud. I pray God to bless the Prince day and night. Where should such as I be but for him? You, I see, Madam, are also English."

"Yes."

The stranger lady glanced at Mary's gold-braided coat and splendid horse.

"But not a refugee?" she questioned.

"No—my home is at The Hague. I am married to a Dutchman."

The other was looking out to sea again.

"Can you tell me how the ships are disposed?" she asked.

"What is your name, Madam?"

"Dorothy Marston."

"Well, Mrs. Marston, those in the foremost squadron, to the left"—Mary indicated them with her riding-stock—"have on board the English and Scotch, commanded by General Mackay—they sail under the red flag of Admiral Herbert."

"Who is given the van out of compliment to the English," remarked Mrs. Marston, with sparkling eyes.

Mary drew an excited breath.

"Those scattered ships, under the white flag, are the Germans, the Prince his guards and Brandenburgers under Count Zolms, and these that bring up the van are the Dutch and the French Huguenots under the Count of Nassau—this squadron is under the orders of Admiral Evertgen."

"And where, Madam, is the Prince?"

"In the centre—you can see his flag with his arms—it is called the 'Brill.'"

"Thank you, Madam—it is a noble sight, is it not?"

Mary laughed softly; she was so secure in her own exaltation, that she felt a kind of pity for the rest of the world.

"Your husband is aboard the fleet?" asked Mrs. Marston, with friendly curiosity.

"Yes," said Mary quietly.

"Well, there is heartache in it as well as pride for us, is not there, Madam?"

Mary answered with sparkling animation, her eyes on the blue flag.

"That is for afterwards."

Mrs. Marston sighed.

"I know—but one storm——"

"Speak not of storms," answered Mary, "when we have all whom we love

on board yonder ships——"

"Not *all*."

Mary turned her eyes from the fleet that was gradually becoming enveloped in the mists of the darkening afternoon.

"How—not all?"

"There are always the children," answered the other lady, with a bright tenderness. "I have three, Madam, whom we keep in Amsterdam, as The Hague is so expensive——"

Mary's horse started, and she caught up the reins and clutched them to her bosom. "They are—boys?" she asked, in a changed voice.

"Two, Madam. If they had gone I should indeed be desolate—but they are too young, and I am selfish enough to be glad of it."

Mary sat motionless. The whole sky was darkening, and hurrying clouds hastened the twilight. The waves were growing in size and making a longer roar as they curled over on to the land; the great ships of war could be seen tossing as their wind-filled sails drove them forwards, and the little boats were pitched low on their sides.

"It indeed seemeth like a storm," said Mary faintly; her courage, her pride, had utterly gone; the eyes she strained to fix on the blue flag were sad and wild.

"A storm?" echoed Mrs. Marston. "O God, protect us!"

Suddenly a low deep murmur rose from the distant multitude.

"What is that?"

"They have lit the lantern on the Prince his ship," said Mary, very low.

The English exile thrilled to see the great clear light hoisted amid the masts and cordage, sparkling, a beacon through the stormy dusk; her thoughts travelled from her children, whom so lately she had spoken of.

"It is sad," she remarked, "that the Prince hath no heir."

"His cousin, the Stadtholder of Friseland, is his heir," answered Mary, with sudden harshness.

"Ah yes; I meant no child. My husband saith it is cruel for any man and terrible for a great Prince—for how useless all seemeth with none to inherit! And such an ancient family to end so suddenly——"

Mary murmured something incoherent, of which Mrs. Marston took no notice.

"I would not be the Princess," she continued, "for her chances of a crown, would you, Madam? It is a cruel thing—I met in Utrecht a Scotswoman who had been her tirewoman, and she told me that the poor lady was like a maniac after her second hopes were disappointed and for ever——"

Mary put out her hand; her face was concealed by the deeping dusk and the shade of her hat.

”Please stop,” she said, in a hard voice. ”I—you do not understand—do people *talk* of this? God is hard, it seems—and you have children, and I *pitied* you. I have been too proud—but humbled enough, I think.”

Her speech was so confused and broken that the English lady could make no sense of it; she stared at her in surprise.

”Why, my speech annoys you, Madam.”

Mary was facing the sea again.

”No—continue—people *talk* of this?” She was facing the overwhelming bitterness of the discovery that her inmost anguish, which had been too sacred to take on her own lips, was matter for common gossip. It was an extraordinary shock, so carefully had the subject always been ignored before her, and yet, she told herself fiercely, she might have known that it was discussed in the very streets, for it was a matter that affected nations.

”You must have heard it spoken of if you have lived any time in Holland,” answered Mrs. Marston—”ay, or in England either—they say ’tis a pity the Princess cannot do as the Queen did, and smuggle an heir out of a warming-pan—why, see, the ships are moving out of sight!”

A great wind had risen which tore the clouds across the paling sky and drove the ships across the rising sea; already a widening expanse of waves showed between the fleet and the sands from which the people were beginning to depart in silent groups; all mist had gone, swept away like vapour from a mirror, and every tumbling crested wave was clear in the storm-light. Mary held herself rigid, watching the blue flag lurching to the pitching of the high vessel; a mere speck it was now, and near the horizon, and she watched it with no feeling of pride now, that was; the momentary exaltation had passed, been crushed utterly by a few careless words.

Mrs. Marston spoke again, but Mary did not hear her; she was alone in a world of her own. The rapidly disappearing fleet was blurred to her vision, but she could still see the great light at the prow of the ”Brill” as the crowded canvas bent and leapt before the sudden fury of the wind.

”A storm,” she said, aloud—”a storm.”

Her horse moved along the dunes and she did not check him; against the blue-black clouds was the indistinct figure of Dorothy Marston on her little knock-kneed hack, excitedly waving her handkerchief to the disappearing ships.

Mary passed her without speaking, then suddenly turned and galloped back towards Scheveningen, where, in front of the church, her attendants were waiting for her; she rode in among them, and, for some reason she could not have herself explained, passed her own friends and singled out Lady Sunderland.

”Let us go home,” she said; ”it is going to be a stormy night.”

The Countess at once noticed the change in her manner—the brave calm

changed to piteously controlled trouble, the superb pride turned to trembling sorrow.

”Those ships, Highness,” she answered, ”can weather very fierce storms.”

”Yet a little accident might sink them,” returned Mary, in a quivering voice—”like hearts, Madam, that are so hurt with little pricks yet will survive a deep thrust——”

She lifted her beautiful face to the failing light; even the lantern on the ”Brill” had disappeared now; the dark sea was almost clear of sail, the horizon was obscured in part by the passing of the vanguard, but for the rest was silver white, a line of radiance fast being obscured by the overwhelming threatening clouds.

In silence Mary turned and rode back to The Hague; the other ladies whispered together, but she said nothing until they reached the ’huis ten bosch’; then the rain was falling in cold drops and the heavy wind was casting down the snapped branches along the wide bare avenue.

They dismounted, and Mary turned impulsively to the little quiet group.

”You are extraordinarily kind to me,” she said, ”and I must thank you all.”

She smiled a little and went from them to her chamber, and then walked straight to the window embrasure and stood listening to the growing sound of the wind that lashed the darkness with spreading fury.

She would not come down to supper or even change her clothes, though she was usually very careful not to disturb the routine of her well-ordered life; yet, in this little intimate court where every one was her friend, she felt she might allow herself this solitude.

With the increasing darkness the storm rose to fierce height; the rain dashed against the window-pane, making the glass shiver, and the wind was tearing through the wood as if every tree must break before it. Mary took off her hat and cloak and called for candles; when they were brought she sent for Lady Sunderland.

The Countess came, looking wan and old; she wore no rouge, and the fair, carelessly dressed hair showed the grey locks unconcealed.

Mary turned to her dry-eyed.

”Do you hear the storm?” she said. She was seated on a low red stool by the window and held a Prayer Book in her right hand.

”My Lady Argyll is weeping downstairs,” said Lady Sunderland; ”but I perceive that Your Highness hath more constancy.”

Mary held up the Prayer Book.

”I have been trying to set my mind on this,” she answered, ”but the devil is busy about me—and I cannot fix my thoughts on anything but—those ships——”

Lady Sunderland, who had made a great clatter with her devotions at

Whitehall, with the sole object of covering her husband's apostasy, but who had no real religion, knew not what to say.

"God," continued the Princess gravely, "must surely protect an enterprise so just, but since His ways are mysterious it might be His will to bring us to disaster, and, humanly speaking, it is a terrible night."

"I fear they will be diverted from their course," said the Countess, "since faith cannot still the winds——"

Mary rose and handed her the Prayer Book.

"I think we should pray—will you read?—I have had a course of humours in my eyes, and of late they are so weak——"

The Countess took the book with shaking fingers, then laid it down on the blue-and-white chintz-covered chair beside her.

"I cannot," she said half fiercely. "It is, Madam, no use."

Mary looked at her curiously, and a pause of silence fell, during which the triumphant progress of the storm seemed to gather and swell abroad like a trumpet blast without the dark window.

Presently Mary said in a moved and barely audible voice—

"Madam—about your son—have you ever thought that you would—forgive me—but he was nothing but pain to you——"

She paused, and Lady Sunderland answered from a kind of self-absorption—

"I did my best. It all seemeth so pointless now we are ruined—I thought of the name, but there is his brother—a cold, hard spirit who hath no kindness for me."

Mary was looking at her intently.

"That must be terrible," she said, breathing quick. "To have children who love one not—do you not think, perhaps, Madam, that it might be better—to—to have none?"

Suddenly Lady Sunderland saw what she meant, divined the desperate appeal for comfort disguised in the halting sentence.

"I do think so, truly, Madam," she answered instantly. "My children have, for all my care, been but discomfort to me."

"But there was the time when they were little," said Mary, with a note in her voice that caused Lady Sunderland to turn away her face. "And you must have been glad of them—I—ah, I forgot what I was saying."

She was young enough herself to be the Countess's daughter, and that lady felt a great desire to take her in her arms and weep over her, but a certain reserve and majesty about Mary's very simplicity prevented her from even discovering her sympathy.

"It is very strange to me to think of my husband abroad in this great storm,"

said the Princess, looking up at the window. ”I bless my God that I have the trust to believe that he is safe,” she added quietly. ”It was as if my heart was torn out when he left me, and since I have been in a kind of numbness.”

”It is hard on women that they must always sit at home,” remarked the Countess; she thought of her own lord lurking in the back streets of Amsterdam; she would rather have been with him than playing her part at The Hague.

The wind rose on a great shriek that seemed to rattle every board in the house.

Mary winced back from the window, and her face was white even in the candle glow.

”Let us go to prayers,” she said faintly.

CHAPTER XV
THE SECOND SAILING

The next day the Prince of Orange re-entered Helvoetsluys attended by four maimed ships, the rest having been utterly scattered and dispersed by the fearful storm; he then, though giddy and scarce able to stand through seasickness, proceeded, with a serene composure, to go from ship to ship animating his discomfited followers, and refused to be put on shore, lest it should be taken as a sign that he was discouraged in his enterprise and intended to postpone his sailing till the spring.

For the next week the great ships of war with tattered sails and broken masts came creeping out of the ports and creeks where they had taken shelter to join the fleet at Helvoetsluys.

Many of the horses had been thrown overboard to save the others, and one transport had been lost on the coast of Ireland, but there was no further damage, and the Prince by his great constancy, enthusiasm, spirit, and courage soon had all repaired and made fit, though he caused it to be put in the Dutch Gazette that he was utterly confounded and his forces so broken by the storm that he could not possibly sail before April, and copies of these Gazettes he saw were smuggled into England, where they were read by King James, who was mightily pleased by this news—and said it was no wonder since the Host had been exposed a week, and thereupon he withdrew all the concessions that the reported coming of the Prince had frightened him into, and so showed plainly that fear and not

desire had wrung them from him; and both the relaxing and the tightening of his rule were fatally too late for his fortunes, for men had no longer any trust in his word or sincerity, and half the great lords were pledged to the Prince, and the greater number thought there could be no salvation save in his coming, so gave no heed to the actions of the King, but watched the weather-cocks and prayed for a Protestant wind.

Within Whitehall was a medley of priests and women, mingled with some honest gentlemen who really were loyal to the Kingship and the House of Stewart, and who were in no way listened to, and silent courtiers who were pledged to William, about the stern foolish King who alternated between weak hesitation and self-confident obstinacy.

Sunderland had kept the business of the Kingdom together, and now Sunderland was gone everything fell into bewildering chaos; the King, distracted between the advices of M. Barillon and the fears of Father Petre, the tears of the Italian Queen and the sullen coldness of his nobles, bitterly regretted Sunderland, whose intrigues he had not as yet any glimpse of. There was a fine fleet the King might have relied on, and the Admiral, Lord Dartmouth, was loyal enough, but the Duke of Grafton, son of the late King, and a rude handsome rake, went down privately to Plymouth and extorted a secret promise from most of the Captains that they would not fight for a Catholic King against a Protestant Prince.

The Army was gathered on Hounslow Heath with the object of overawing the capital, and the advice of those spirited gentlemen who were truly desirous to see the King retain his dignities was that he should put himself at the head of it and so advance to meet the invader.

But the spirit that had inspired James when he was rowed with his flag through the fires of Solebay had long left him; his courage had been the mere flash of youth and noble blood; he was old now, and his soul sank before danger; the terrors of his father's fate, the miseries of his own exiled youth, came upon him with horrible vividness; he let disasters crowd down upon him, and clung to his priests and his faith with the despair of stupidity.

Meanwhile the Prince of Orange, having taken a second leave of his wife and the States, sailed with great pomp, the sound of trumpets, the flutter of flags, and the discharge of artillery, from Helvoet, having been but eleven days repairing his ships, replacing his horses, and reassembling his fleet, and having, by the serenity of his behaviour, the unfaltering decision of his actions, the wisdom of his proposals, snatched glory from disappointment, as was ever the way of this Prince.

The little advice packets that darted out from the coast of England to watch his movements reported that he was making for the north, in which direction, with a brisk gale in his sails, he indeed steered for twelve hours; but when the

night fell and the advice packets had hastened home with news, the Prince signalled to his fleet to tack about, which it did, and, with all the sail it could spread, put before the wind to the westward, and under a fair sky bore for the coasts of Devon.

This ruse had its full effect, for Lord Feversham, who commanded the English troops, was bid march northwards, and all the cattle were ordered to be driven from the coasts of Yorkshire.

With the next dawn the Dutch van made the Channel, along which it stretched for twenty miles in full view of England and France, the shores of both these countries being covered with spectators who viewed a sight such as had not been seen in these waters since the great Armada crossed these seas, a hundred years before.

The magnificence of this procession of mighty ships, which took seven hours to pass, going at their full speed before a strong east wind, the strength and purpose that they symbolized, the power of the Religion, once despised and oppressed, but that now was able to split the world into factions, whose name showed beneath the arms of Orange, that family which of all others had been most distinguished in the defence of liberty, the sheer pomp of war in the great vessels with their guns, flags, and netting, their attendant ships and companies of soldiers on board, the prestige of the man who led this daring expedition, all combined to thrill the hearts of those who watched, whether on the French or English coasts, whether they uttered curses or blessings, prayers for failure or success.

About noon, they then being in Calais roads, the Prince gave orders to lay by, both to call a council of war and to strike terror into the two watching nations by displaying his strength in this narrow sea.

Accordingly he himself changed to the foremost vessel, taking with him his own standard, and there waited for the rest of the armament to come up, which they presently did, and formed into one body, sixteen ships square, only a league at each side, from either shore, and when they were drawn up, the Prince, from that ship which was nearest the English coast, signalled that the two famous forts of Calais and Dover were to be saluted, which was done at the same moment with great thunder of the deep-mouthed artillery, which was an astonishing spectacle that there should be in Dover Straits a fleet so huge that it could salute these two forts at the same time and be but a league from either. There was something awful in the sound of this warlike courtesy, to the ears of both nations, and some awe and terror mingled with their admiration as the smoke obscured the green dancing waves.

From Dover Castle there was no reply, the doubt of England being expressed in this silence; but from Calais came a proud answering salute as from a

mighty foe who honours himself by the formalities of respect to his adversary, and the Prince standing on the upper deck amid the slow-clearing gunpowder vapour flushed to hear again the French guns who had last spoken to him among the heights of St. Denis, ten years ago.

At the council of war now held it was decided that the disposition of the fleet should be changed, for news had come that the English, who lay at the Gunfleet, were making full endeavours to overtake and fight the Dutch, for though Lord Dartmouth knew that half his officers were pledged to the Prince, and his men very doubtful of engaging in the cause of the King, yet he resolved to use his utmost powers to prevent the landing of His Highness, for he was under personal obligations to James, who had always treated him more as a friend than a subject, and was filled with an honourable desire to serve His Majesty in this crisis.

The Prince, knowing this from my Lord Grafton, was eager to avoid a conflict, for however well disposed the English sailors might be to his religion and person, he wisely suspected that a nation so proud, and in particular so jealous of their prestige on the sea, would, when faced in order of battle with those people whom they had so often and so recently fought, forget everything save the desire to achieve a victory over that Republic which alone disputed with them the over-lordship of the ocean.

For this reason His Highness had given Admiral Herbert the command of his armament, that the English might salve their arrogance by the thought that an Englishman led this invading force; yet he secretly believed that the names of Herbert and Russell would not prove so potent a motive for peace, as the sight of the foreign flags, jacks, and haughty ships would prove an incentive to rage in the bosoms of the British, who could endure, it seemed, any hardship but the idea of foreign dominion.

Therefore it was decided that the Prince and the transports with the troops should continue to lead the van with three ships of war to guard him, and so, sailing down the Channel, make the coast of England, in the west, and that the bulk of the fleet should remain in the van ready to engage the English should they leave their station and venture into the open straits.

But this, though it was the thing he most longed to accomplish, Lord Dartmouth found impossible, for that east wind so favourable to the hopes of the Prince was a tyrant to him and held him helpless abreast of the Long Sands, with his yards and topmasts down incapable of purchasing his anchors, while he beheld some of the Dutch vessels pass within his very sight making triumphantly for the coast he was bidden protect while his ships rode at their station useless as a fishing fleet.

And this was in some part the fault of my Lord Dartmouth, who cursed the wind in a passion of misery, for he had ignored the advice of His Majesty, who

was a knowing man in naval affairs, which was to anchor east of the Gallopper, so that his ships might be free to move which way they pleased, instead of which he acted on his own sense, which was not equal to the King's advice; as was proved, for the scouts, who were left at the Gallopper, captured a Dutch transport, and if they had been greater in strength might have served the whole body of the invader the same.

Now in full sight of the shores of these two countries, England and France, the Dutch fleet performed their evolutions, with the pomp of war, the discharge of artillery, the music of trumpets and drums, and the salutes of the entire armament to the ship which carried the Prince and his standard as she made her way to the van; and this all under a blue sky crystal-clear that reflected in the tumbling waves lashed by the strong high English wind a hundred tints of azure and water-green, above which the smoke hung in light vapours.

The Prince, under full sail, made for Torbay, which was large enough to contain a great number of the transports, but the Dutch pilot, not being just in his reckoning, went past both that port and the next, which was Dartmouth. The third port was Plymouth, but this being a naval station and a well-fortified place, the Prince was by no means inclined to risk a landing there, since he was not certain of the disposition of the inhabitants towards him, and his great object on land, as on sea, was to avoid a combat, since his sole argument for interfering in the affairs of England was the wish of the English themselves and the invitation of their principal nobles, as he had acknowledged in his Declaration, and it would give a very ill look to this claim of his if his landing was opposed by a bloody fight.

Yet to tack about to enter Torbay was attended by almost equal danger, since the wind had changed, and Lord Dartmouth with his entire fleet had left Long Sands and was now under full sail in pursuit.

The Prince, distracted by these conflicting considerations, knew not what course to take, and was tortured by the most cruel anxiety, since to either advance or retire might be followed by misfortunes fatal to his whole design.

While he was still undecided as to what orders to give and which risks to choose, the wind changed in an instant to the south, which had the effect of bringing the Prince within a few hours into Torbay and forcing the English Admiral back to Long Sands.

It being the 4th of November when the Prince saw the cliffs of Devon and the great natural harbour overlooked by the tourelles and towers of Brixham and Torquay, he was anxious to effect a landing there, because it was both his birthday and the anniversary of his marriage, and so he put off in a cock boat with a few of the English nobles and M. Bentinck, and came ashore at Brixham, where there were none but fishermen to receive him, the which stood about staring half in

admiration, half in awe, thinking maybe of Monmouth's landing not so far off nor so long ago, and how the county had suffered for it under the executions of my Lord Chief Justice.

The Prince called for horses, which were being landed as fast as might be where the water was shallower; yet it was not possible to make the landing effectual till the morrow, and but few of the transports were able to land that night.

The Prince, who had well studied the map of England, resolved to march to Exeter and there wait the coming of his English friends; but for this night the wooden tent that he used in war was put up in a neighbouring field, to the great amazement of the country-folk, who had never beheld anything of this nature.

The friends and followers of the Prince being gathered about him to congratulate and flatter, among them came his chaplain, Dr. Burnet, expounding in his usual talkative excitement on the marvellous success of the expedition.

The Prince was more than ordinarily cheerful, and spared the rebuke with which he usually checked the meddling enthusiast.

He gave the Englishman his hand, and looking round the darkening landscape said, with a smile—

"Well, doctor, what do you think of predestination now?"

CHAPTER XVI
NEWS FROM ENGLAND

The weeks that followed, so full of great events, passions, movements, and suspenses in Britain, passed with an almost uneventful calm in The Hague, where the Princess, round whose rights half the turmoil had arisen, and the wives of many eminent men engaged in, or affected by, the rapid changing of events, waited for the packets that brought the English letters, and lived in between their coming in a kind of retired anxiety supported by prayers and saddened by tears.

The Elector of Brandenburg and his wife came on a visit to Mary, and she entertained them as best she might with her heart aching with other thoughts. They went, and she was alone again and free to go to and from her chapel and wait for her letters and wonder and dread the future through the cold winter days in the quiet town, which seemed, as she was, to be waiting with suspended breath.

The progress of affairs in England came brokenly and from various sources, letters arrived slowly, at irregular intervals, delayed by ice-blocked rivers, storms at sea, detained messengers. At first the news was of the Prince's progress to Exeter and the cold reception of that city, the long delay of his friends to join him, the mere wondering apathy of the country-people, who made no movement one way or another, save to make a spectacle of the passing of this foreign army and to petition the Prince that he would, when he could, remove the hearth tax.

The next news was that when the Prince was near resolved to return home the spirited English gentry began to rise in his favour, the Lord Wharton and the Lord Colchester marched from Oxford to join him, and my Lord Lovelace broke through the militia, and though arrested once and taken to Gloucester, yet forced out of prison, and with the help of some young gentlemen who had taken up arms for the Prince, drove all the Papists out of that city, and so joined His Highness at Exeter; soon after the Lord Delamere came from Nottingham and took Chester, which, under a Papist, Lord Molineux, held out for the King, and my Lord Danby rose up in the North, and with other persons of quality seized on the city of York and turned out the Papists and clapt up the Mayor, while Colonel Copley, with the aid of some seamen, seized Hull and the powder magazine, and the Earl of Bath took Plymouth from the Earl of Huntingdon and declared for the Prince, as did all the seaport towns in Cornwall.

At which, the news ran, the King went to join his army at Salisbury, having sent the Prince of Wales to Portsmouth, but afterwards returned to Windsor upon an alarm of the approach of M. de Schomberg, and so to London, where he found his favourite, Lord Churchill, his son-in-law, Prince George, and his daughter, Anne, had fled to the Prince of Orange, attended by the suspended Bishop of London, who had signed the invitation to His Highness. Then followed news of the skirmish at Wincanton, where some of the Prince's guards under Lieutenant Campbell were put to the rout by the King's men, commanded by that gallant Irishman, Patrick Sarsfield; soon the fleet, growing cold in the service of His Majesty, sent up an address for a free parliament and the army deserted by the regiment.

Now the King took out of the Tower Sir Bevil Skelton, late ambassador to Versailles, cast there for the move he had concerted with M. D'Avaux, which if truly followed had saved the King, as he now came to say, and so made Sir Bevil governor of the Tower and Master of the Keys of the Kingdom.

After which he went to Hungerford in great despair of mind, where, advised by the Queen and the Jesuits, he sent overtures to the Prince, offering to defer all grievances to the calling of a free parliament, the writs for which the Lord Chancellor Jefferies had already been bid to issue.

The Lords Halifax, Nottingham, and Godolphin, having taken this message,

brought back an answer which was the best the King could have hoped for, since it made only those demands which were reasonable, such as that the Papists should be removed from office and that Tilbury Fort and the Tower of London should be put into the hands of the Capital.

But when they returned with these terms to Whitehall, the commissioners found that the King, either through fearfulness or weakness, or wrought on by the advices of M. Barillon, had taken the extraordinary resolutions—first, of sending his wife and son to France, and secondly, of flying London himself, leaving the government in chaos. Upon which these three lords, perceiving they had been sent on a mock embassy, became for ever incensed against His Majesty. He left a letter for the commander of the army, a Frenchman, Lord Feversham, which that general took to be an order for the disbanding of the forces, which finally put everything into the greatest disorder.

The next letters that came to The Hague were full of the Prince's success against the Irish Guards at Twyford Bridge, outside the town of Reading, and the behaviour of the multitude in London, who, as soon as they heard of the departure of the King and the Jesuits, and the near approach of the Prince of Orange, got together and demolished all the new mass chapels and convents; among which was the great monastery of St. John, which had been two years building at a great expense, but was now burnt down and the goods seized as the monks were hurriedly removing, besides all the timber stored in Smithfield for the finishing, which was stacked into a bonfire and burnt at Holborn by the river fleet.

Likewise the chapels in Lime Street and Lincoln's Inn Fields, the lodgings of the resident of the Duke of Florence, and Nild House, which was the mansion of the Spanish Ambassador, were spoiled and defaced; yet to the great credit of the English people, in all this heat and excitement, there was not one slain or even hurt.

To put a stop to these mischiefs, the lords who were then in London went to the Guildhall and, having demanded the keys of the Tower from Sir Bevil Skelton and delivered them to the Lord Lucas, they took upon themselves the governance of the kingdom for the maintenance of order and the prevention of bloodshed. At first they associated with themselves the magistrates of the city, but on finding that those who are born traders cannot contest with gentlemen in great affairs, they used them not as their colleagues but as their servants, and gave their orders as the King had done.

Soon after they invited the Prince, who was now at Windsor, to London, and the same day that he received their address he was presented with another to the same effect from the city of London, which he accepted with more pleasure, and let it be seen that he did; for his titles and encouragements had always come from the people, and his enemies from the nobles, both in his own country and

England.

To the anxious hearts at The Hague all seemed now clear for a peaceful conclusion, when the news came that the King, having by foul weather been cast upon the coast of Kent, was there stopped and roughly handled by several of the common people who knew him not.

When the governing lords heard of this they sent an express begging His Majesty to return to London, which he did after some difficulty, and on Sunday, being the 16th of December, entered the capital, attended by some troops of the Life Guards and Grenadiers; and a set of boys following him with cheers put up his spirits so that he thought he had the people with him again.

At this juncture he sent the Lord Feversham to His Highness at Windsor, asking him to come to St. James's and settle matters; but His Highness had by now perceived that no settlement of any difficulty could be arrived at while this obstinate, foolish, and fearful King remained in London, and, having discovered that His Majesty had no courage to resist authority, he took a high hand, arrested the Lord Feversham for travelling without a passport, and sent three lords to Whitehall with a message desiring the King to retire to Ham, having first secured all the posts and avenues about Whitehall by replacing the English guards by Dutch. On receipt of the message the King instantly agreed, only asking that it might be Rochester and not Ham, which desire being communicated to the Prince by messenger (His Highness being then at Zion House), who sent an answer by M. Bentinck that he gave his consent, only adding that he wished His Majesty to leave early that he might not meet him on the road.

So the King, having with him the Earl of Arran and a few other gentlemen, went by barge to Gravesend and so overland to Rochester, where he lay in the house of Sir Richard Head.

The afternoon of this day on which the King left London for ever, the Prince and his retinue came to St. James's, the whole city shouting and blazing in his honour. But having always hated these displays, and despising the levity that prompted them, he drove by a back way to the Palace, and the people got no sight of him. All the persons of quality in town now flocked to offer their congratulations, and the city sent up a most obliging address which His Highness very cordially received; soon the lords and the city requested the Prince to take the government on himself, which he did, his first act being one which gave him peculiar satisfaction—he ordered M. Barillon to leave the kingdom in twenty-four hours, and had him escorted to the coast by Dutch guards, which was a severe knock to the pride of France.

As to the affairs of the kingdom, he ordered writs to be issued for the calling of a Convention, which was to consist of all persons who had sat in parliament during the reign of His Majesty Charles II.

All this was great and triumphant news to the States and the Princess. The nobility then at The Hague came to compliment Her Highness, and three deputies were sent from the States-General to congratulate the Prince, and were magnificently received by the English.

The Prince then commanded all Papists to depart out of London and Westminster within three days, and to engage the city in his interest he asked them for a loan, and though the security was but his bare word and the sum he asked but a hundred thousand, they subscribed three hundred thousand and paid it in, in so many days.

His Majesty being gone to Windsor so as not to prejudice the meeting of the Convention, that body came together on the 22nd of January, and after having humbly thanked His Highness for their deliverance, prayed him to continue to administer the government, and appointed a day of thanksgiving, fell to considering what course they should take.

With comparative ease they declared the throne vacant by the flight of the King, but were not so quick in deciding who should fill it. The Prince meanwhile kept silence, observing the same composure that he had maintained during the whole progress of the Revolution, even hunting, staying at private houses, and keeping out of the capital; only sending one brief letter to the Convention, in which he prayed them to come quickly to a decision, as there was the safety of Europe to consider.

Despite this withdrawal of himself, this calm that he displayed in the midst of the turmoil, he was the pivot round which all circled, the one authority respected by all, the one defence against anarchy and mischievous confusion.

The English, who knew in their hearts that they could not do without him, could by no means make up their minds what to do with him, and soon, after their custom, split into very decided parties, which were most violent against each other and got every day farther from a settlement.

At this time the news that reached The Hague was of the most astonishing and unwelcome to the Princess, and this was the manner of her receiving it, one day, very cold, in late January. She was riding in her chariot in the Voorhout, reflecting on this extraordinary revolution in her native country, and thinking of her father (who was now fled to France), when she was accosted by M. D'Avaux, who still remained at The Hague.

The Princess was much surprised by this, and was giving a mere formal salute, when M. D'Avaux, with his hat clasped to his bosom, galloped up to her open chariot in such a manner that she could do nothing but desire it to stop.

"Ah, Madam," said he, smiling, and very courteous, "am I to condole with the daughter of King James or congratulate the wife of the Prince of Orange?"

She looked at him, very pale, but with a great majesty.

”You are to respect a woman in an extraordinary and sad situation, Monsieur,” she answered gravely.

”Extraordinary indeed, Your Highness,” said M. D’Avaux. ”But scarcely sad to you, I think, who are like to be Queen.”

It flashed through Mary’s mind how near to war they must be with France before he could venture to speak so.

She answered instantly—

”I take no public reprimand from the Ambassador of France, Monsieur.”

M. D’Avaux bowed.

”More a congratulation, Highness, to the future sovereign of England.”

Her look of amaze was not to be concealed. His keen eyes, that never left her face, remarked it.

”Ah, Your Highness hath not heard the last news from England?” he asked quietly.

”News from England!” repeated Mary, ”I hear nothing else——”

”Then you will have heard that the Convention is for making you Queen, Madam,” he answered, ”which perhaps is not quite the consummation His Highness desired.”

Mary gazed at him a second, then made a motion with her gloved hand to the coachman.

”It is cold to keep the horses waiting,” she said, and so drove on.

Cold indeed, and the snow beginning to fall in heavy flakes across the straight fronts of the noble houses in the Voorhout; the people of quality gathered there on horseback and on foot began to scatter before the chilly wind and slow darkness. The Princess shuddered inside her fur coat, and drove back to the ’huis ten bosch.’

As she passed down the gaunt avenues of bare trees overshadowing frozen water and frozen ground, showing between their dark trunks glimpses of a pale February sunset fast being blotted out by the thick snow clouds, she felt to her very heart the awful desolation of approaching change, the wild regret for a happy period closed, the unnameable loneliness which assailed her when she considered how she was being caught up and hurried into a whirl of events foreign and distasteful.

When she reached home she asked for her letters; but evidently the packet that had brought M. D’Avaux his had none for her. She made no comment, but played basset awhile with Lady Sunderland, went early to her prayers, then wept

herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XVII
FAREWELL TO HOLLAND

Soon after the Groote Kerk had struck midnight, one of the Princess's Dutch ladies came to the chamber of her mistress with the news that letters from England had come, it being the command of Mary that she should always be roused, whatever the hour, when the mail arrived.

She came out now, in her undress—a muslin nightshift with an overgown of laycock, and with her hair, which was one of her principal beauties, freed from the stiff dressing of the day and hanging about her shoulders—into the little anteroom of her bedchamber, where the candles had been hastily lit and the tiled stove that burnt day and night stirred and replenished.

There were two letters. She had no eyes save for that addressed in the large careless hand of the Prince, and tore it open standing under the branched sconce, where the newly-lit candles gave a yet feeble light from hard wax and stiff wick, while the Dutch lady, excited and silent, opened the front of the stove and poked the bright sea coals.

The Princess, who had waited long for this letter, owing to the ice-blocked river, was sharply disappointed at the briefness of it; the Prince requested her to make ready to come at once to England, as her presence was desired by the Convention, told her what to say to the States, and remarked that the hunting at Windsor was poor indeed compared to that of Guelders.

Mary laid the letter down.

"I must go to England, Wendela," she said to her lady; then sat silent a little, while the candles burnt up to a steady glow that filled the room with a fluttering light of gold.

"Is my Lady Sunderland abed?" asked Mary presently.

"No, Madam; she was playing cards when I came up."

"Will you send her to me, Wendela?"

The lady left the room and Mary noticed the other letter, which she had completely forgotten. She took it up and observed that the writing was strange; she broke the seals and drew nearer the candles, for her eyes, never strong, were now blurred by recent tears.

The first words, after the preamble of compliments, took her with amazement. She glanced quickly to the signature, which was that of Lord Danby, then read the letter word for word, while her colour rose and her breath came sharply.

When she had finished, with an involuntary passionate gesture and an involuntary passionate exclamation, she dashed the letter down on the lacquer bureau.

Lady Sunderland, at this moment entering, beheld an expression on the face of the Princess which she had never thought to see there—an expression of sparkling anger.

"Ill news from England, Highness?" she asked swiftly.

"The worst news in the world for me," answered Mary. Then she cried, "This is what M. D'Avaux meant!"

The Countess raised her beautiful eyes. She was very fair in rose-pink silk and lace, her appearance gave no indication of misfortune, but in her heart was always the sharp knowledge that she was an exile playing a game, the stake of which was the greatness, perhaps the life, of her husband.

"What news, Highness?" she questioned gently.

Mary was too inflamed to be reserved, and, despite the vast difference in their natures, a great closeness had sprung up between her and the Countess during these weeks of waiting.

"They wish to make me Queen," she said, with quivering lips, "to the exclusion of the Prince. My Lord Danby, whom I never liked, is leading a party in the Convention, and he saith will have his way——"

Lady Sunderland was startled.

"What doth His Highness say?"

"Nothing of that matter—how should he? But he would never take that place that would be dependent on my courtesy—he!" She laughed hysterically. "What doth my lord mean?—what can he think of me? I, Queen, and the Prince overlooked?—am I not his wife? And they know my mind. I told Dr. Burnet, when he meddled in this matter, that I had sworn obedience to the Prince and meant to keep those vows——"

She paused, breathless and very angry; her usual vivacity had changed to a blazing passion that reminded Lady Sunderland of those rare occasions when His late Majesty had been roused.

"My lord meant to serve you," she said.

"To serve me!" repeated Mary, "when he is endeavouring to stir up this division between me and the Prince—making our interests different——"

"You are nearer the throne, Highness——"

Mary interrupted impatiently—

"What is that compared to what the Prince hath done for England? Can

they think," she added, with a break in her voice, "that I would have done this—gone against—His Majesty—for a crown—for anything save my duty to my husband? What must *he* think of me—these miserable intrigues——"

She flung herself into the red brocade chair in front of the cabinet, and caught up the offending letter.

"Yet," she continued, with a flash of triumph, "this will give me a chance to show them—where my duty lieth——"

She took up her pen, and Lady Sunderland came quickly to the desk.

"What do you mean to do?" she asked curiously.

"I shall write to my lord, tell him my deep anger, and send his letter and a copy of mine to the Prince."

Lady Sunderland laid her hand gently on Mary's shoulder.

"Think a little——"

Mary lifted flashing eyes.

"Why should I think?"

"This is a crown you put aside so lightly!"

The Princess smiled wistfully.

"I should be a poor fool to risk what I have for a triple crown!"

"Still—wait—see," urged the Countess; "'tis the crown of England that my lord offereth——"

"Do you think that anything to me compared to the regard of the Prince?" asked Mary passionately. "I thought that you would understand. Can you picture him as my pensioner—him! It is laughable, when my whole life hath been one submission to his will. Oh, you must see that he is everything in the world to me ... I have no one else——" She continued speaking rapidly, almost incoherently, as was her fashion when greatly moved. "At first I thought he would never care, but now he doth; but he is not meek, and I might lose it all—all this happiness that hath been so long a-coming. Oh, I will write such a letter to my lord!"

"You sacrifice a good deal for the Prince," said the Countess half sadly.

"Why," answered Mary, "this is easier than going against my father, and giving the world cause to scorn me as an unnatural daughter——"

Her lips quivered, but she set them proudly.

"I have talked enough on this matter, God forgive me, but I was angered by this lord's impertinence."

The Countess made some movement to speak, but Mary checked her.

"No more of this, my Lady Sunderland," she said firmly. She took a sheet of paper from the bureau and began to write.

Lady Sunderland moved to the stove and watched her intently and with some curiosity. The wife of my late Lord President was tolerably well informed in English politics, and knew that the Tories would rather have the daughter than

the nephew of the Stewarts on the throne, and that the great bulk of the general nobility would rather have a woman like the Princess than a man like the Prince to rule them.

She did not doubt that Mary, with her nearer claim, her English name and blood, would readily be accepted by the English as Queen, and that the nation would be glad to retain the services of her husband at the price of some title, such as Duke of Gloucester—which had been proposed for him before—and whatever dignity Mary chose to confer on him. She certainly thought that this scheme, pleasing as it might be to Whig and Tory, showed a lack of observation of character on the part of the originator, my Lord Danby; Lord Sunderland had always declared that it was the Prince they needed, not his wife, and that they would never obtain him save for the highest price—the crown.

Yet the Countess, standing in this little room, watching Mary writing with the candlelight over her bright hair and white garments, seeing her calmly enclose to the Prince Lord Danby's letter and a copy of her answer, could not help some wonder that this young woman—a Stewart, and born to power and gaiety—should so lightly and scornfully put aside a crown—the crown of England.

When Mary had finished her letters and sealed them, she rose and came also to the stove. She looked very grave.

"The Prince saith not one word of our losses," she remarked—"Madame Bentinck, I mean, and M. Fagel, yet both must have touched him nearly. I am sorry for M. Bentinck, who hath had no time to grieve."

"What will happen in England now, Highness?" asked the Countess, thinking of the Earl.

"I suppose," said Mary, breathing quickly, "they will offer the Prince the throne ... he commandeth my presence in England ... I must leave Holland——"

"You love the country?"

"Better than my own. I was not made for great affairs. I love this quiet life—my houses here, the people..."

She broke off quickly.

"What will you do, Madam?"

Lady Sunderland indeed wondered.

"Go join my lord in Amsterdam," she answered half recklessly. "An exile remains an exile."

"The Prince," said Mary gravely, "hath some debt to my lord. He never forgetteth his friends—or those who serve him."

"I thank you for that much comfort, Madam."

"You must return to England—to Althorp," continued the Princess gently; "you have done nothing that you should stay abroad——"

Lady Sunderland shook her head.

”What is Althorp to me, God help me! I think my home is in Amsterdam—I shall go there when Your Highness leaveth for England.”

Mary put her cool hand over the slim fingers of the Countess that rested on the back of the high walnut chair.

”Are you going with Basilea de Marsac?”

”Yes; she is a good soul.”

”A Catholic,” said Mary, with a little frown; ”but I like her too—better than I did——”

”She hath become very devoted to Your Highness; she is very lonely.”

”What was her husband?”

Lady Sunderland smiled.

”An incident.”

Mary smiled too, then moved back to the bureau.

”I must get back to bed; I have a sore throat which I must nurse.” She coughed, and moistened her lips. ”I am as hoarse as a town-crier.” She laughed again unsteadily and rang the silver bell before her. ”I never pass a winter without a swelled face or a sore throat.”

The Dutch waiting lady entered, and Mary gave her the letters.

”See that they go at the earliest—and, Wendela, you look tired, get to bed immediately.”

With no more than this she sent off her refusal of three kingdoms. When they were alone again she rose and suddenly embraced Lady Sunderland.

”Do you think I shall come back to Holland?” she asked under her breath.

”Why—surely——”

”Ah, I know not.” She loosened her arms and sank on to the stool near the stove. ”Sometimes I feel as if the sands were running out of me. You know,” she smiled wistfully, ”I have an unfortunate name; the last Mary Stewart, the Prince his mother, was not thirty when she died—of smallpox.”

She was silent, and something in her manner held Lady Sunderland silent too.

”A terrible thing to die of,” added Mary, after a little. ”I often think of it; when you are young it must be hard, humanly speaking, but God knoweth best.”

”I wonder why you think of that now?” asked Lady Sunderland gently.

”I wonder! We must go to bed ... this is marvellous news we have had tonight ... to know that I must sail when the ice breaketh ... good night, my Lady Sunderland.”

The Countess took her leave and Mary put out the candles, which left the room only illumed by the steady glow from the white, hot heart of the open stove.

Mary drew the curtains from the tall window and looked out.

It was a clear frosty night, utterly silent; the motionless branches of the

trees crossed and interlaced into a dense blackness, through which the stars glimmered suddenly, and suddenly seemed to disappear.

The chimes of the Groote Kerk struck the half-hour, and the echoes dwelt in the silence tremblingly.

Mary dropped the curtain and walked about the room a little. Then she went to the still open desk and took up the remaining letter—that of the Prince.

With it in her hand she stood thoughtful, thinking of her father in France, of all the extraordinary changes and chances which had brought her to this situation, face to face with a dreaded difference from anything she had known.

She went on her knees presently, and rested her head against the stool, worked by her own fingers in a design of beads and wool, and put the letter against her cheek, and desperately tried to pray and forget earthly matters.

But ever between her and peace rose the angry, tragic face of her father and the stern face of her husband confronting each other, and a background of other faces—the mocking, jeering faces of the world—scorning her as one who had wronged her father through lust of earthly greatness.

CHAPTER XVIII
BY THE GRACE OF GOD

The Princess's boat, with her escort of Dutch warships, rode in the Thames at last. The frost had broken, and she arrived not long after her letter to Lord Danby had scattered that statesman's party, and frustrated his hopes of placing her on the throne. The Prince having soon after declared his mind to the lords in council, that he would accept no position dependent on his wife's pleasure or the life of another (for there had been talk of a regency, leaving the King the nominal title), made it clear that if his services were to be retained, if he was not to abandon them to the confusion, strife, and disaster from which his presence alone saved them, he must be King. All parties uniting, then, on what was now proved to be the winning side, the Convention voted the offer of the crown to the Prince and Princess jointly—the sole administration to rest with him.

The succession, after naming the direct line, was left vague to please the Prince, who was free to flatter himself that he could choose his own heir.

This news had come to Mary before she left The Hague, and she knew that the day after her landing there would be a formal offering and acceptance of the

crown of Great Britain. She beheld the prospect with extraordinary sensations as, passing Gravesend, and leaving her vessel and escort at Greenwich, she proceeded in a state barge to the more familiar reaches of the river, Rotherhithe, Wapping, and presently the Tower, rising golden grey in the chill spring sunshine, by the bridge with the deep crazy arches through which the water poured in dangerous rapids. Crowded with houses was this old bridge, and in the centre a little chapel with a bell, now ringing joyfully.

Mary remembered it all—the long busy wharves, now taking holiday; the barges, boats, and compact shipping now hung with flags; Galley Key, where the slaves in chains unlade the oranges, silks, and spices from the East; the houses, on the side of Surrey, among which rose the spire of the great church at Southwark; the merchants' houses built down to the water's edge, with pleasant gardens filled with poplar trees and set with the figureheads of ships in which some adventurer had sailed his early travels long ago in the time of Elizabeth Tudor; and the distant prospect of the city itself shimmering now under an early haze of sunshine.

All was utterly strange, yet nothing was altered; it looked the same as when, weeping to leave England, she had come down these waters in a barge with her silent husband, ten years ago, and waited at Gravesend for the wind.

One difference attracted Mary's eyes. Behind and beyond the Tower a mass of scaffolding rose that dominated the whole city, and through the crossed poles, boards, and ropes, she could discern the majestic outline of the dome of that vast church which had been slowly rising out of the ashes of the old St. Paul's since she was a child.

At the Tower Wharf she landed, laughing hysterically, and hardly knowing what she did. They gave her a royal salute of cannon, and she saw all the guards drawn up in squares, with their spears in the midst, and a red way of brocade carpet laid down for her, and a coach with white horses and running footmen, and beyond, a press of noblemen and officers, and the sheriffs and aldermen of the city with the Lord Mayor.

She hesitated on the gangway, amidst her ladies, her spirit completely overwhelmed. She looked round desperately for some one to whom to say—"I cannot do it—I cannot put it through. I must die, but I cannot be Queen."

The complete incomprehension on the excited faces of these ladies, the strangeness of many of them, recalled her with a shock to herself; she felt as if she had been on the point of betraying her husband. She recalled his last letter, in which he had asked her to show no grief or hesitation in her manner, and, biting her lips fiercely, she stepped firmly on to English soil, and managed somehow to respond to the lowly salutations of the crowd pressing to receive her. The Prince was by the coach door; she noticed that he wore his George and garter, which he had not done perhaps twice before. There were a great many gentlemen behind

him, many of them those whom she had already met at The Hague, others strange to her, several of the Dutch officers, and M. Bentinck in mourning for his wife.

Mary, still English enough to think her country the finest in the world, was thrilled with pleasure to see how respectfully all these great nobles held themselves to the Prince. She was used to see him receive this homage in his own country and from the magnates of the Empire, but these Englishmen were to her more than any German princes.

The Prince took her hand and kissed it, and said very quickly in Dutch—

"I would that this had been in Holland."

The English gentlemen bowed till their long perukes touched their knees, Mary entered the coach with Lady Argyll and a Dutch lady, the Prince mounted his white horse, and the cavalcade started through the expectant city with all that pomp which the people would not forgo and the Prince to-day could not avoid.

All London was eager for a sight of the Princess. The last Queen, foreign, proud Romanist, and hard, had never been a favourite, the Queen Dowager had never counted for anything, and was now a forgotten figure in Somerset House; but Mary was English, Protestant, and her image had long been faithfully cherished in England as that of a native Princess who would some day restore the old faith. Therefore her greeting was such as made her turn pale; she had never before heard such thunders of acclamation, popular as she was in the United Provinces.

Every road, every housetop, all the windows, alleys, and turnings were filled with well-dressed, orderly people, who cheered her and cheered the Prince till Mary felt dizzy. She saw in this their true title to the crown; the lords were but obeying the people in setting it on their heads, and she recalled how these same Londoners had besieged the doors of Westminster Hall, while the Convention was sitting, and threatened to use violence if the Prince was not elected King.

Her appearance of beautiful youth, her sparkling excitement, her gracious smiles made a favourable impression, and further roused the enthusiasm which the very stiff demeanour of the Prince, to whom this display was hateful, was apt to damp.

By the time they reached Whitehall she was more popular than he, and the nobles who rode in the procession thought to themselves that the English wife would serve to keep the foreign husband in the affections of the people.

Whitehall was filled with English, Dutch, and Scotch waiting to kiss her hand: Mr. Sidney was there, Mr. Herbert, Mr. Russell, Lord Shrewsbury, Lord Devonshire, Lord Halifax, Lord Godolphin, Lord Danby, and others whom she did not know or had forgotten; their background was that splendid palace, seeming vast and magnificent indeed after her houses in Holland, which she had left so sadly ten years ago. Then she had wept, now she laughed and was very gracious,

but in her heart she was as reluctant to enter Whitehall as she had ever been to leave it; the memories the place aroused were poignant, not sweet.

It was three hours before she found herself alone with the Prince in that gorgeous little chamber that had once been her father's, and still contained his pictures, statues, his monogram and arms on chairs and carvings.

The instant he had closed the door the Prince kissed her in silence, and she burst into speech.

"Are you satisfied? Are you pleased? Is this another step in your task—they—these people—will they help? How long the time hath seemed!"

"To me also," said the Prince unsteadily.

She stepped back to look at him anxiously: he was extravagantly vestured in embroidered scarlet, lace, jewels, the George and garter conspicuous, and a great star of diamonds on his breast. A close scrutiny showed that he looked more ill and weary than she had ever known him.

"You are changed," she said quickly. "Oh, my dear, the climate doth not suit you——"

He smiled languidly.

"I would we had met in Holland," he answered. "I am sick for Holland, Marie."

"Already?"

He seated himself in the deep window-seat that overlooked the privy garden and she took the low stool beside, studying him wistfully for one hint of that enthusiasm and elation which she hoped would be called forth by his splendid success.

"We could not have asked God for a more happy ending," she said in a trembling voice.

"They—the English—will declare against France," he answered, but without spirit, and as if it was an effort to speak at all. "If I could get them into the field this spring——" He was interrupted by his cough, which was violent and frequent, and he flung the window open impatiently. "There is no air in this place," he continued, in a gasping voice; "their smoky chimneys and their smells are killing me; I cannot endure London."

"We need not live here," said Mary quickly.

"They think so," he returned; "'tis our post, where we are paid to be——"

The scarcely concealed bitterness with which he spoke of England was a matter of amaze and terror to Mary, in whose ears still rang the enthusiastic shouts of the people and the flatteries of the courtiers.

"But you are popular——" she began.

"Hosanna to-day, and to-morrow crucify!" he answered. "I shall not long be popular—the great lords have not loved me from the first. They offer me the

throne because there is no other to serve their turn, and I take it because it is the only way to secure them against France. But I undertake hard service, Marie."

"You mean—the difficulties?"

"The difficulties! I confess I am overwhelmed by them; everything is confusion—everything! To get the bare Government on a business footing would take a year's hard work, saying every one was honest—and every one is corrupt. I can trust none of them. There is Ireland in a ferment and the Scottish affairs in a tangle; there are a hundred different parties, with indecipherable politics, waiting to fly at each other's throats; the Church is hydra-headed with factions—and a cow might as well be set to catch a hare as I set to put this straight, and I have had the business of Europe to conduct already."

Mary's pride and pleasure were utterly dashed. Troubles and difficulties she had been prepared for, but they had been vague and distant; she had not thought to find the Prince already whelmed in them. She reflected swiftly on the anxiety, labour, and anguish that had gone to this expedition, the odium they had both incurred, the violence she had done her own feelings, and she wondered desperately if it had been worth the price.

The Prince took her hand, having noticed the paling of her face and the distress in her eyes.

"We will talk of other things," he said, with an effort over his tired voice. "I am weak to burden you at once with this; you at least will be beloved here——"

Mary broke in passionately—

"I do not love England—nor want to be Queen. I doubt I can do it—I was made for little things and peace—I hate this palace," she glanced desperately round her father's splendour; "our own homes—where we were so happy—are they not better?"

The Prince went very pale.

"I should not have repined," he said; "it is my task, which I must put through ... the part you have been made to take is the worst for me—the part you may have to take——"

"If it serveth you I am very content," she answered; "if I can do anything to help I shall be happy——"

The tears sprang into the Prince's eyes. He looked away out of the window.

"Marie—about His late Majesty—I could not help—that he was stopped in Kent ... I would not have had it happen——"

"Do not fear," she answered wildly, "that I do not in everything hold you justified?"

Her voice broke, and she began to weep.

The Prince rose and helped her to her feet.

"We must not show tears here," he said gently, "for we are not at home—but

among many enemies——"

She dried her eyes and smiled bravely.

"Do we feel constraint so soon?"

"We pay something," he said sadly, "that we are, by the grace of God, Monarchs of England."

PART II
THE QUEEN

"I have really hardly had time to say my prayers, and was feign to run away to Kensington, where I had three hours of quiet, which was more than I had had together since I saw you.

"That place made me think how happy I was there when I had your dear company; but now—I will say no more, for I shall hurt my own eyes, which I now want more than ever.

"Adieu! Think of me and love me as much as I shall you, who I love more than my life."—QUEEN MARY TO KING WILLIAM, 15*th July* 1690.

"Every hour maketh me more impatient to hear from you, and everything I hear stir I think bringeth me a letter.... I have stayed till I am almost asleep in hopes; but they are vaine, and I must once more go to bed and wished to be waked with a letter, which I shall at last get, I hope ... adieu! Do but love me and I can bear anything."—QUEEN MARY TO KING WILLIAM, *July* 1690.

—"My poor heart is ready to break every time I think in what perpetual danger you are; I am in greater fears than can be imagined by any who loves less than myself.

"I count the hours and the moments, and have only reason left to think—as long as I have no letters all is well.... I never do anything without thinking—now, it may be, you are in the greatest dangers, and yet I must see company on my set days; I must play twice a week; nay, I must laugh and talk, tho' never so much against my will. I believe that I dissemble very ill to those who know me; at least it is a great constraint to myself, yet I must endure it. All my movements are so watched, and all I do so observed, that if I eat less, speak less, or look more grave, all is lost in the opinion of the world; so that I have this misery added to that of your absence and my fears for your dear person, that I must grin when my heart is ready to break, and talk when my heart is so oppressed I can scarce breathe.... Besides, I must hear of business, which, being a thing I am so new in and so unfit for, doth but break my brains the more and not ease my heart....

"Farewell! Do but continue to love me and forgive the taking up so much of your time to your poor wife, who deserves more pity than ever any creature did, and who loves you a great deal too much for her own ease, tho' it can't be more than you deserve."—QUEEN MARY TO KING WILLIAM,

5*th September* 1690.

CHAPTER I
A DARK DAWNING

In the King's antechamber at Kensington House my Lord Dorset and one of his pensioners (of which he had a many) awaited an audience of His Majesty.

It was a year since the Revolution, a cold-wet autumn, and Kensington House, recently bought from my Lord Nottingham, stood blank and sad among dripping wet trees.

Lord Dorset strolled to the window and looked out on the great park spreading to the horizon. He, in common with every other Englishman, found both house and grounds an ill substitute for Whitehall, where the King would never go when not forced, spending his time at Hampton Court, Holland House, or here, in this half-built villa, still disfigured with the scaffolding poles of the alterations Mr. Wren was putting in hand. Lord Dorset sighed; he was a tolerant, sweet-natured man, more interested in art than politics; he had been magnificent as Lord Buckhurst, and was more magnificent as Marquess and holder of the office of Lord Chamberlain.

Presently the Lords Shrewsbury and Nottingham came out of the King's Cabinet; the first looked downcast, the second sour.

Dorset lifted his eyebrows at Shrewsbury, who said dolefully as he passed—

"Good God! we are like to get on the rocks—nothing is right."

When the two Secretaries of State had passed, Lord Dorset remarked to his young companion, with a kind of good-natured softness—

"You see—I have brought you to Court in an ill time; perchance I had best not press for an audience to-day——"

But even as he spoke the door of the Cabinet opened and the King came out.

He stood for a second in the doorway, looking at the few gentlemen standing about the bare, large room; then his glance fell on Lord Dorset, who moved forward with his splendid air of grace.

"Is it the wrong moment to present to the notice of Your Majesty the young poet of whom I spoke yesterday?"

The King's large open eyes turned to the pale and agitated young man in question, who instantly went on his knees.

”A poet?” repeated William; the word to him conveyed a mild, but scarcely harmless madness. He thought the patronage of these people an irritating trait in his Lord Chamberlain. ”Have we not already poets in our Court?”

Lord Dorset smiled.

”This poet, sir, is also a very good Protestant, and one who did much service in writing of satires——”

”We have always uses for a clever pen,” said William, in whose own country the printing press was a powerful political engine. He turned gravely to the young man—

”What is your name?”

”Matthew Prior, Your Majesty.”

”You wish a post about the Court, Mr. Prior?”

The aspirant lifted sincere and ardent eyes.

”I have desired all my life to serve Your Majesty,” he answered, which was true enough, for he cherished an almost romantical admiration for William.

”My Lord Dorset,” said the King, ”is a fine guarantee for any man; we will find some place for you——” He cut short protestations of gratitude by saying, ”You must not expect us to read your poems, Mr. Prior.”

”Your Majesty was ever severe on that art,” smiled Lord Dorset.

”I do not understand it,” said William simply; but the Lord Chamberlain had a fine enough perception to discern that there had been more poetry in the actions of the King’s life than ever Matthew Prior could get on paper. He took the following silence for dismissal, and withdrew with his grateful pensioner.

The King drew out his watch, glanced at it, and called up one of the ushers at the further doors.

”When Lord Halifax arriveth bid him come at once to us.”

He hesitated a moment, looking at the sombre prospect of grey and rain to be seen through the long windows, then returned to his private room and closed the door.

A wood fire burnt between two brass andirons and filled the plain closet with warmth, above the walnut bureau hung a map of the United Provinces, and on the high mantelshelf stood several ornaments and vases in blue-and-white delft.

The King seated himself in the red damask covered chair before the desk, and mechanically took up the quill that lay before him; but presently it fell from his fingers and he leant back in his seat, staring at the map of his country.

Since his coronation in April last, nay, since his first assuming the government a year ago, everything had gone wrong, and he had been blamed for it; nothing could exaggerate the difficulties of his position. He had partially expected them, for he was not naturally sanguine, but his worst imaginings had

fallen short of the actual happenings.

Affairs had now reached a crisis. In England, Scotland, and Ireland was a deadlock, on the Continent imminent peril, and the King, for the first time in his life, doubted his own capacity to deal with such huge obstacles as those which confronted and threatened to overwhelm him.

Sitting utterly still, he mentally faced the task before him.

He believed that to fail utterly was impossible, since that would be to deny the teaching of his own soul, and so, God; but he might fail partially, and he might, even in winning a small measure of success, forfeit tremendous stakes.

The loss of personal ease, of his popularity in England, a complete misunderstanding of his motives, the rancorous, malicious hate of his enemies—these things he had, from the moment of his coronation, been prepared for; but it might be that he would be called upon to make vaster sacrifices—the friendship of many former supporters, even their long-cherished love and loyalty, the trust and confidence of the allies, the admiration of the dissenting churches throughout Europe, even his own peace of soul. Everything in brief, that he valued, save the love of Mary and the friendship of William Bentinck, must be pledged, and might be lost in this forthcoming conflict.

He had honestly and justly tried to satisfy the English, but had met with utter failure. They reproached—reviled him, complained, and loudly voiced their dissatisfaction; he had not pleased one of those who had placed him on the throne. The chaotic state of the Government might, to a superficial observer, appear to give some warrant for their discontent; but, as the King cynically observed to himself, they were incapable of even suggesting a remedy for the ills they so decried; he did everything, and Whig and Tory alike agreed in putting all burdens on his shoulders, then in blaming his administration.

In the crisis of '88 their action had been oblique. They had shifted the almost intolerable confusion of affairs into his hands, then stood back to watch and criticise, while he, who had already the business of half Europe on his mind, made what order he could out of jarring chaos. His health had broken under the strain; even his friends noticed a new languor in him, which the English were quick to dub sloth. Deprived of his one recreation of hunting—for which he had no time—hardly able to endure the stenches and smoke of London, his reserved temper taxed almost beyond bearing by the incessant, unreasonable, shortsighted quarrelling by which he was surrounded, he felt his strength slipping like water through his hands.

His popularity had gone as he had predicted it would. The Jacobites were already a tremendously strong party, and his own ministers were half of them already beginning to traffic with the exiled King—who was now in Ireland with French troops, and of whom it had been said that, would he but change his reli-

gion, he could not be kept out of England six weeks.

William, reviewing his position, smiled at the shallow taunts that accused him of having thirsted for a crown.

He was working like a galley-slave for England—working with insufficient money, false servants, unfriendly onlookers, and an apathetic nation ready to seize on frivolous pretexts to dub him unpopular—and his reward for labours, that perhaps not one of his subjects had any conception of, was the nominal dignity of kingship and the long-fought-for alliance of England with the States.

He was certainly paying a bitter price.

All the great nobles were dissatisfied. The King had a keen dislike of party, and his ideal of government was a cabinet comprising of the best men of every faction to advise a ruler free to decide the final issue of every question. He had tried this scheme in England, equally honouring Whig and Tory, and taking his ministers from the rival ranks.

The plan had been an utter failure; each faction wanted the supreme control. The Whigs wanted the King to become their champion, and avenge them indiscriminately on every Tory; the Tories, who had always been opposed to William, refused to work with the Whigs; Danby, created Marquess of Caermarthen at the Coronation, was furious because he had not the privy seals; Halifax, to whom they had been given, grudged Danby the Marquisate; the two Secretaries, Shrewsbury and Nottingham, were scarcely on speaking terms; Russell, now Lord Orford, and Herbert, now Lord Torrington, quarrelled fiercely over the naval affairs; at the Treasury Board, Lord Mordaunt, now Earl of Monmouth and Lord Delamere, both hot Whigs, did their best to disparage their colleague, Lord Godolphin, who, of all the Government, was the quietest man and the one most esteemed by the King; Clarendon, the Queen's uncle, had refused to take the oaths; and his brother Rochester was suspected of plotting with James. There was, in fact, scarcely one Englishman, even among those who had accompanied William to England, whom he could trust, yet the advancement and favour he showed his Dutch friends was made the matter for perpetual and noisy complaint.

On the other hand, the Church of England, which owed its very existence to the Revolution, proved itself unreasonable and ungrateful; it refused stubbornly to grant any concessions to Non-conformists, and wished severe penalties visited on the Papists.

Added to this, the home government was rotten to the core, the army and navy in a miserable state, the people overtaxed, business disorganised, the treasury empty, credit low, every one discontented, Ireland in the possession of James, a revolt in Scotland, and, on the Continent, the French making unchecked progress, and the Dutch beginning to complain that they were being neglected

for the English.

When it is considered that the man who was to face and overcome these difficulties was disliked, distrusted, misunderstood, and betrayed on every hand, it can be no wonder that even his brave soul was drooping.

His position was in every way complex. By nature imperious, arrogant, of the proudest blood in Europe, he had a high idea of the kingly prerogative, and by instinct leant to the Tories; but the Whigs claimed him as peculiarly their champion, and it was undoubtedly to their influence that the Revolution was due. As King of England he was head of the Anglican Church and swore to uphold it; but he was a Calvinist himself, and the whole tenor of his life had been towards that broad toleration which the Church regarded with abhorrence. He was avowedly latitudinarian and set his face resolutely against any form of persecution for religious belief, and while this attitude cost him the support of the Church, his refusal to treat the Catholics harshly lost him the alliance of the Dissenters, who regarded him as disappointingly lukewarm in the true cause.

A gentle treatment of the Papists was essential to William's foreign policy, since he had promised his Catholic allies—Spain, the Emperor, and the Pope, to protect those of this persuasion—and it was, besides, his own conviction of justice and the general good. He had therefore forced through Parliament the Toleration Act, which was, however, too limited to heal the internecine disorders of religious parties; he had then endeavoured to bridge the schism between Nonconformists and Anglicans by the Comprehension Bill, but the measure was before its time and failed to pass.

Many of the bishops and clergy having refused to take the oaths and been obliged to resign, William had been forced to make new appointments, every one of which, including that of his chaplain, Dr. Burnet, to Sarum, caused universal dissatisfaction.

There had been a mutiny in the army which had to be repressed by Dutch troops—a further grievance to the English, who began to bitterly resent foreign soldiers in their midst; yet on these troops alone could the King rely.

William's lieutenant, the popular and brilliant Schomberg, had proved an expensive failure. He was at present in Ireland, with a huge army dying of fever about him, doing nothing but writing maddening letters of complaint to the King, who had, on the other hand, to listen to the ceaseless goadings of the English Parliament, who wished to know why Ireland was not reduced, and, until that plague spot was attended to, who refused to turn their attention to the Continent, where the great events gathered that were ever next William's heart.

Those were the great difficulties, but there were many smaller vexations, such as the party the Princess Anne, under the influence of those adventurers—the Churchills—was forming against the Court; the sulky, unreasonable be-

haviour of Lord Torrington at the Admiralty Board; the constant necessity the King was under of going to London (the air of which was literally death to him), and of dining in public at Whitehall—a practice he detested; the lack of money for the buildings at Hampton Court and Kensington, which were both in an uncomfortable state of incompletion; his own ignorance on little technical points of administration and costume, which made him dependent on his English advisers—all these were added annoyances and humiliations that went far to unman a nature well inured to strenuous difficulties.

The King made a little movement forward in his chair with a short cough, as if he caught his breath, his eyes still fixed on the map of the United Provinces; his haggard face slightly flushed as if he was moved by some intense thought.

The latch clicked, and William turned his head quickly.

In the doorway was the handsome figure of the tolerant, able, and cynical chief adviser to the Crown, the Lord Privy Seal, my Lord Marquess Halifax.

CHAPTER II
THE KING AT BAY

My Lord Marquess left His Majesty after a dry and formal interview concerned with minor but necessary business, and, leaving the King still sitting before the map of the United Provinces, proceeded to the incomplete and ill-furnished council-chamber, where my lords Shrewsbury, Caermarthen, Nottingham, and Godolphin were gloomily conferring.

Halifax was the only man in the assembly not of decided Whig or Tory politics—it was believed that this was the reason that the King had elected him to fill the highest place in his councils. Lord Caermarthen, who, jealous of his elevation, was known to be secretly working his downfall, greeted him with haughty frankness.

"I hope, my lord," he said, "your interview with His Majesty hath had some smack of satisfaction in it——"

"Why, none," answered the Lord Privy Seal; "there is no satisfaction anywhere."

He seated himself on one of the red damask covered stools by the table, and looked with a kind of cynical amusement at the other ministers, all of whom, he well knew, were, however diverse their several opinions (with the exception

of Lord Godolphin), doing their utmost to oust him from the position he held. His mobile, easy, and delicate face was turned towards the meagre but noble figure of Caermarthen, in whom he recognised his chief enemy. Indeed, that statesman, who, as Lord Danby, had himself narrowly escaped the attacks of Jack Howe in the last Parliament, was endeavouring to stir up the present Commons to impeach Halifax.

"His Majesty," added the Lord Privy Seal, in his pleasant, tolerant voice, "is very discontented with all of us."

Shrewsbury—a duke now, and crowded with dignities beyond his years—blushed.

"What are we to do?" he asked, in a kind of frantic way.

The other Secretary, Nottingham, dark as a Spaniard and sour in expression, remarked briefly—

"We can do nothing until we see which way the Parliament moveth."

"The Parliament," said Caermarthen, "will do nothing until some satisfaction is given for the money voted to Ireland. Schomberg, I doubt, is doited; he hath not moved since he landed——"

"The King," put in Halifax, "is desperate to go to the Continent, where the allies clamour for him and King Louis gaineth headway every week——"

Caermarthen sprang up from the window-seat.

"By God, he cannot go abroad until Ireland is settled!" he cried; "the country will not stand any war but that——"

"The King," answered the Lord Privy Seal, "hath such a mind to France one would think he took England but on the way——"

"France," said Shrewsbury, with feverish anxiety, "is not the question; we have to think of England. War was declared last May, and we are still incapable of putting a single regiment in the field. By Heaven, the Government is too disjointed for us to interfere in foreign affairs!"

"You should have thought of that, my lord," answered Nottingham dryly, "when you put a foreigner on the throne."

A deep colour again flushed Shrewsbury's beautiful face.

"I judged from His Majesty's reputation that he would have done better," he murmured.

"His Majesty is a great man," said Halifax placidly.

Caermarthen shrugged his shoulders.

"Is it the kind of greatness that will help England?"

"Or your party to places, my lord?" retorted the Lord Privy Seal shrewdly.

Caermarthen's thin face darkened.

"His Majesty doth not know his friends," he said.

"He will not be a party leader," returned Halifax; "but I do doubt whether

England will be ever governed save by factions——"

Shrewsbury came up to the table and looked round the faces of his colleagues. He was by far the youngest of the company, and his soft good-looks were incongruous to the importance of his position; Lord Godolphin, a quiet, thin man, who so far had not opened his lips or taken any notice of anything, now fixed his eyes on Shrewsbury, and kept them there keenly while the Duke spoke.

"Sirs, what is to be done? We have very good assurance that the Government cannot hold—nay," he added, with increasing agitation, "if King James were to land to-morrow, who would stay him from the throne?"

"His Majesty," said Lord Godolphin quietly.

Caermarthen caught the words.

"His Majesty! I have little faith in him now; he is a dying man——"

"The doctors," added Nottingham gloomily, "give him another year——"

"No more, I truly think," said Halifax calmly. "The Dutchmen themselves say they hardly know him for the man he was at The Hague——"

"What then?" cried Shrewsbury, in a desperate frankness. "Are we all to fall into the laps of women and my Lord Marlborough?"

"The Queen could never hold the throne," answered Halifax; "she is not loved," he smiled; "the people dislike her for her false position——"

"By God!" interrupted Caermarthen hotly; "what know you of Her Majesty? She would rule better than any Stewart hath done yet——"

"Maybe, and wed another foreigner," retorted Shrewsbury. "Besides, I think you are wrong. No woman could rule England now——"

"Nor any man, it seemeth," smiled Halifax sadly. "For my part I am weary of all of it—and so, I think," he added, "is His Majesty. He is greatly angered that the Bill of Indemnity is changed into a Bill of Pains and Penalties, and there are such heats over it——"

"What course doth he think to take?" asked Shrewsbury abruptly.

"He said very little to-day," answered Halifax. "Our talk was all of business; he is of an extraordinary industry," this with admiration, "and hath mastered the details of the government already. Were he a stronger man I should have no fear for England——"

"Talk—antic talk!" cried Caermarthen impatiently; "and are no nearer a solution——"

The sound of the opening of the heavy carved door caused them all to pause. Godolphin, who was the only one facing it, rose respectfully; the others turned.

It was the King.

His bright glance went from face to face. He came slowly to the head of the

table, and seated himself in the wand-bottomed chair there; his ministers were on their feet waiting for him to speak. Surprised as they were by this unexpected appearance, their agitation showed in their faces, Shrewsbury in particular was colourless; only Lord Godolphin remained perfectly composed.

The King continued to look from one to the other; he wore a heavy brown velvet thickly braided with gold, and held in his right hand a paper written upon, and folded across.

"Affairs," he said, in his tired voice, with his peculiar short manner of speaking, "have reached a crisis, my lords, and I have come to acquaint you with my resolution."

He leant forward a little, and rested his right arm on the table, keeping his dark, powerful eyes fixed on these ministers whom he read so perfectly.

"My lords," he continued quietly, almost gently, "it is a year since I took up the government of this country, and in that time I have done nothing to please any one of you." He coughed and pressed his handkerchief to his lips. "I have done my best to govern justly," he added proudly, "but I confess I took up a task beyond my powers. My lords, I cannot rule a disaffected country with disaffected ministers. I admit I do not understand you. As I am often reminded, I am a foreigner."

The five nobles made a common movement as of painful expectation. The King's plain speaking took all words from them; Shrewsbury was painfully agitated.

"What doth Your Majesty propose?" asked Halifax anxiously.

The King opened out the paper on the dark walnut table, and laid his right hand on it. He wore round this wrist a bracelet of red glass or crystal, cut into facets, that caught and threw back the light; it gleamed now strongly through the thick Bruges lace of his ruffles.

"I mean," he said, "to resign the crown and return to Holland—where I am needed," he added strongly.

"My God!" exclaimed Caermarthen; the rest were silent.

The King surveyed their changed and utterly amazed faces with a gleam in his eyes.

"My convoy is in readiness," he said, "and here, my lords, is the speech in which I announce my intention to Parliament"—he glanced at Sidney Godolphin—"my lord," he added with dignity, "will do me a last service and correct my poor English——"

Caermarthen broke out passionately—

"Sir, you cannot know what you are saying—this is unheard of——"

"I know very well what I am saying, my Lord Marquess," answered William. "I cannot please you, but I think the Queen can. I believe you would be faithful to her—she is English; but as for me, you can manage your business better without

me—and I am needed on the Continent."

He rose, and Halifax, rather pale, came up to him.

"What is to become of England if Your Majesty leaveth us?"

"The Queen will please you," repeated William.

"This action on the part of Your Majesty will mean chaos," cried Shrewsbury desperately.

The King smiled sternly.

"No confusion could be worse than what we now endure—perhaps alone ye can put it straight."

They looked at each other. In their hearts they all knew that the King, and the King alone held them together and kept them from France; to the Whigs his departure would mean ruin, and among the Tories there was not one man capable of undertaking a tithe of what the King—who had foreign affairs exclusively in his hands—performed.

"What is Your Majesty's reason for this bitter resolve?" cried Caermarthen.

"I am needed in Holland," said William. "I have, my lord, my lifework to do. There are certain things put to my hand for me to accomplish, and I have pursued them through too many difficulties to be thwarted now by the disputes of the English Parliament——"

He spoke with a sudden force that lashed them.

"I took this crown," he added, holding his hand to his breast, "that I might, with God His help, put England in her ancient place among nations, not that I might lose myself in heated factions and blind animosities."

"If Your Majesty desert us we are all undone," said Caermarthen passionately.

"Ah, my lords," answered William, "I am not of a nature to be the puppet between your parties. God gave me a disposition different—I cannot mix in these your politics."

His cough interrupted him; he gave a little shudder, and sank back into the walnut-backed chair.

"There are some things beyond a man's strength," he said hoarsely, "and I, hampered as I am, cannot govern England."

"I," cried Halifax sincerely, "have tried to help Your Majesty——"

"And what is your reward?" asked William quickly. "Parliament is so pressing on you, my lord, that I shall have to forego your services—what is any honest man's reward in this country? As angry dogs ye rend each other. My God, will there never be an end to these dissensions?"

He crushed the rough draft of his speech up in his hand and flung it on the table.

"There is my answer to this question," he said, and made to rise again, but

Shrewsbury came forward and cast himself on his knees before him.

"I entreat Your Majesty to consider—to reflect—to spare us, to spare this unhappy country——"

The King looked wildly but not unkindly into the fair, agitated young face.

"I cannot do what you want of me," he answered. "Everything I do displeaseth—I stand for toleration and ye will have no manner of toleration—hath not the Indemnity Bill become a Bill of Pains and Penalties? Is not Parliament busy looking up charges of twenty years ago against men of position? Is not the Church crying out against the Dissenters, and the Dissenters against the Papists?"

They were all silent; Shrewsbury on his knees by the King's chair.

"As to the civil government," continued William, "ye know perfectly well what corruption is there. For the last two reigns every honour in the gift of the Crown hath been put up to sale with women and priests for brokers—I can trust no one save, of course, yourselves, my lords," he added, with a faint sarcasm. "There is neither honesty nor industry nor credit in any department of the administration. I can do no more."

Lord Godolphin came forward from the window; he was known to be higher in favour with the King than any there, and the others waited with a silent, anxious curiosity for him to speak.

"I think Your Majesty will change your resolution," he said, with sudden warmth, "for the sake of Europe."

"For the sake of Europe, my lord, I shall persist in it."

Sidney Godolphin looked straightly at the King.

"No—Your Majesty is not the man to shirk difficulties—bear with us a little."

"My lord," answered William, "if all were as you I should have no difficulties—rise up, my lord of Shrewsbury; this is not your fault."

The Duke got to his feet and retired to the deep window-seat; he appeared utterly overwhelmed.

"I undertook to serve a King," said Godolphin, deeply moved. "Let me resign that service while you are still my King—if Your Majesty becomes Prince of Orange I become a private gentleman. I pray Your Majesty accept my resignation."

"And mine, sir," added Halifax.

"I hope that you will serve the Queen," replied William; he leant back in his chair and his face was colourless against the red brocade cushion.

"It was to Your Majesty I swore obedience," said Godolphin firmly.

"I set you free of those oaths—all of you, my lords—my convoy waiteth at Gravesend. In Holland I can be of service—not here." He, with infinite weariness, sat up and took his speech from the table. "Take this, my lord." He held it out to

Lord Godolphin.

The minister went on one knee.

"I cannot be a party to this," he said. "Your Majesty must forgive me—but I cannot——"

The blood rushed into the King's thin cheek.

"What do you want of me?" he cried passionately. "You know I do not shirk labour. I have worked like a government clerk since I have been in London, and I am well used to it—but it is no use."

Godolphin answered him with equal passion.

"Is all this labour to come to nothing, sir? If Your Majesty giveth up, there will be no heart in any of us—everything will fly asunder, and we be unprotected for the French and Irish to overrun. Your presence, your Dutch troops alone keep order. Without you we are lost again, and worse than we were before '88——"

"Your Majesty cannot—Your Majesty must not," cried Caermarthen.

Shrewsbury raised his face; he was trembling, and weeping softly.

"God in heaven!" he whispered, under his breath.

Nottingham looked at him with contempt.

"Will Your Majesty forsake your friends?" he asked sombrely. "Where do we stand if Your Majesty resigns the position we asked you to accept?"

"Sir," said Halifax firmly, "the Prince of Orange cannot go back on what he hath undertaken."

William leant forward, resting against the table; his eyes filled with tears, and he gave a short cough as if he caught his breath.

"You ask too much of any man—to rule this country under the disadvantages that whelm me," he said faintly. "I was not made to be cabined in these small factions——"

"We cannot do without Your Majesty," said Halifax sharply. "Are all your glorious deeds and achievements to end in this, sir?"

The King put his hand before his eyes and sobbed heavily.

"O God," cried Godolphin, in bitter distress, "what pass is here?" He turned on the others. "Is this to what we have brought the Prince who saved us?"

The tears were in his own eyes, and his voice was broken.

Halifax spoke to Caermarthen.

"This is like to be the end of us, my lord," he remarked. "Cry 'finis'! for the play is over now."

The King continued to weep; his whole frail figure was shaken with his passion. The last cold daylight was over his gold broideries and the crimson bracelet round his wrist. Caermarthen was pacing to and fro in a kind of frenzy.

"What is to do!" he asked himself. "What is to do!" and he clutched the cambric ruffles on his bosom.

Godolphin again dropped on his knees before the King and took William's cold left hand to his lips.

"Your Majesty will not leave us," he murmured, in a quivering tone.

The King lifted his great eyes, blurred, yet bright, with tears.

"If I stay," he answered, "it is on certain terms—I will not be the puppet of factions." He stopped, exhausted; he composed himself and flushed feverishly; his speech was interrupted by continual and painful coughing. "I will not be a party to persecution." He clenched his thin hand on the smooth curved arm of his chair, and spoke with a force and energy that gripped and almost frightened his listeners. "A measure must be passed to prevent it—and I must go to The Hague next spring."

"Ireland——" began Caermarthen.

William caught up the word.

"I will go to Ireland—since ye think so much of that wretched country I will get it——"

Even in the midst of their relief that they had moved him the ministers were shaken at this resolution.

"Your Majesty cannot be spared from London," exclaimed Halifax.

"I shall prorogue Parliament before I leave," answered William fiercely. "That or nothing, my lords. I do not stay here to be King Log——"

They bowed before his terms as they had done in the crisis of '88; only Shrewsbury, who saw the downfall of his party in the prorogation of a Whig Parliament, made a feeble protest.

"Fever is epidemic in Ireland—the health of Your Majesty——"

"You fear to lose me, my lord, before I have served your turn!" was struck out of the King; then he amended his contempt, for he was ever fond of Shrewsbury. "It is the only thing to do—if the reduction of Ireland is necessary before the Continental Campaign—I must go." He looked sharply round. "Gentlemen, do you take these terms—will you unite to help me to them?"

"We have no choice," said Lord Godolphin, and he tore the draft of the King's speech across.

CHAPTER III
THE BEST OF LIFE

It was early May; the King was walking in his park at Kensington, with his friend, William Bentinck, Earl of Portland.

It was the eve of his departure for Ireland; he had yesterday prorogued Parliament, and laughed a little as he related the discomfiture of the Whigs at his speech.

"I shall be glad to be under canvas again," he added. "For myself it will be a holiday, but I pity the poor Queen." He repeated with great tenderness—"the poor Queen!"

"How doth she take your going?" asked the Earl.

"Ah, heavily—what have I brought her but affliction?—sometimes I think of that——"

He spoke sadly, and pressed Bentinck's hand.

"Be good to the Queen," he said wistfully. "As you love me, William, help the Queen when I am not here.... I think women have the harder part."

"I have great faith in her courage and wisdom, sir," said the Earl.

"There is no woman like her," answered the King, under his breath. He added aloud, with a flashing smile, "As there is no friend in the world like you!"

"Ah, sir," cried Portland, much moved, "you ever flattered me."

He was not so reserved as the King nor yet so demonstrative. William could express by word and letter, strong passion, but this was not possible to William Bentinck. Devotion to his master was the motive power of his life, but he could not say so.

The King again pressed his hand affectionately. They were walking under limes, and hawthorns white with blossom. The sky shone cloudy blue, and the pale English sunshine was over the young grass.

William looked round him with the sick eyes of exile; thoughts of Holland tugged so sharply at his heart that he gave a little suppressed sound of pain.

"What of this Crone and Fuller plot?" asked Portland suddenly.

"I am sorry to leave that on the Queen her hands," said William quietly; "but I do not think it serious."

"Some great men are implicated?"

"I do not doubt it."

Portland hesitated a moment, then said—

"Nottingham's spies intercepted letters to St. Germains, he saith—who were they from?"

"People of no station," answered the King. "Nottingham is over zealous."

"And you, sir, are over easy."

William smiled at him, and seated himself on a wooden bench under one of the limes.

"That is an old complaint between us, is it not?" he said kindly. "Dear lord,

let it be——"

Portland smiled also; he was not satisfied; he stirred his cane among the scattered hawthorn flowers and his fair face hardened. After a little he asked his dismissal, and turned towards Kensington House.

The King remained alone in the park, sitting a little droopingly; he hardly ever held himself erect now; he had shifted his sword-belt so that the weapon was across his knees, and he held pommel and point of the scabbard with his bare, delicate hands; his clothes were dark and plain; he wore high riding-boots and a beaver with a great plume of white feathers. So still he sat, and so shaded was his figure in the deep glowing shadow cast by the lime boughs of budding foliage, that a young man coming moodily along the path was upon him before he noticed that any sat there.

"Ah, sire!" he exclaimed, in confusion, and pulled off his hat.

William looked up at him; it was the Duke of Shrewsbury.

"I am glad to see you, my lord. I wished to speak to you."

"I was about to seek an audience of Your Majesty."

Shrewsbury was in a painful agitation, further increased by this sudden meeting with the King, utterly unlooked for. It was rare to find William at leisure or on foot.

The King's deep eyes regarded him sadly and kindly.

"Was it to a second time offer your resignation?" he asked.

Shrewsbury went crimson under his powder; he seemed to find it difficult to maintain even a show of composure.

"Yes, Your Majesty," he answered.

"Very well," said William quietly. "I am sorry that you will not serve me till my return from Ireland."

"Sire, my health," murmured the Duke faintly—"I have had a fall from my horse—I am not fit."

Still holding his sword in both hands, the King rose.

"My lord—is that your sole reason?" he asked gently.

The blood ebbed from the young man's soft face; he answered with an effort.

"My sole reason, Your Majesty."

William continued to fix his eyes on him.

"My lord, when did you last see Roger Fuller?"

Shrewsbury shivered; he stammered painfully.

"I—I—do not know—the fellow——"

"I take your word, my lord," said William gravely.

He dropped his sword, and laid his hand with a gentle dignity on the young man's heaving shoulder.

”Remember I trust you,” he added quietly.

”Sir,” cried Shrewsbury, through pale lips—”what is your meaning—do you think——”

”I think that you are a man of honour,” said William. ”You have given me your word, and I trust you. Remember it.”

”Your Majesty,” began the Duke wildly, ”I never meant——”

”Hush,” interrupted the King. ”I know nothing. Take care of your health, my lord.”

He touched his hat and moved on. The young Duke looked after him with eyes of agony, then stumbled wretchedly away through the trees.

William proceeded slowly to the privy garden, which was full of stocks, pinks, wallflowers, aloes, and early roses.

He found the Queen and Lady Nottingham seated in front of a great bush of box clipped into the shape of a peacock. Between them was a length of yellow silk that they were sewing with blue beads in little crosses and stars.

At the King’s approach Lady Nottingham rose and retired with a courtsey. Mary looked after her kindly.

”She is a sweet lady—I like her vastly,” she said.

”You find most ladies sweet, do you not?” answered the King; he seated himself beside her on the bench, and took up the end of silk Lady Nottingham had laid down.

”I have spoilt your work. But I wished to tell you something, Marie.”

Mary glanced at him anxiously; she was slightly pale, and wore a black scarf wrapped round her head and shoulders; her petticoat was striped red and frilled at the foot, her over-gown dark blue and spread round her in circling folds of glittering silk. For all the sombre heaviness of this stately dressing she looked very young—sad, also, for all the desperate gaiety to which she was continually nerved.

The King looked about him to see that they were not overheard, then said, in a low voice—

”I have accepted my Lord Shrewsbury his resignation.”

Mary waited, catching her breath.

”He,” continued William, ”hath tampered with His late Majesty.”

The Queen gave a little sound of distress, and dropped her sewing.

”Shrewsbury!” she whispered.

”I have sure proof of it,” said the King. ”I am sorry for him,” he added simply; ”and for myself, it something moved me, for I ever liked my lord.”

Mary flushed and clenched her hands on her lap.

”How base every one is,” she cried, and the angry tears glittered in her eyes.

”There is not much honour in England, Marie. Have a care of all of them—

particularly of that knave"—he spoke with strong force—"that villain, my Lord Marlborough——"

"Need he be of the Council?" she asked eagerly.

"Child, he is the best soldier in England, and if I was to leave you a Council of honest men they could not be of this nation—trust none of them."

"God help me," said the Queen. "I know not how I shall support myself when you are not here—but how weak I am to talk thus—my part is little compared to yours."

She smiled with a pitiful brightness, and the King, looking at her, flushed as if he had been hurt and suppressed the pain.

"Talk no more of this," he said quickly—"in this little time we have together——"

Mary laid her hand on his.

"How pale the sunshine is—not thick and golden like The Hague—the flowers seem so different too; is not that a silly fancy?" She smiled again, and her voice quivered.

"You are not happy here, Marie."

She answered hastily.

"Happy wherever I have your dear company—but I confess I am a coward without you—but God is greater than our hopes, our fears, our desires; He knoweth best."

When her soft voice ceased the only sounds were those of water running in the lead basin of a fountain hidden somewhere behind the alleys of wych-elm, and the occasional distant blows of a hammer from the workman engaged on the scaffolding of Kensington House.

She spoke again at last, her white fingers tightening over his.

"I wonder if you will ever rest—if achievement will ever come—at last, if you will ever think your work done——"

"How can I?" he answered. "That is my sole excuse to live—that there is something for me to do—and I am so used to work I think I could not rest——"

"It hath been hard—hard and long," said Mary. "You must be so weary of it all—the lying, the treachery, the weakness, the opposition, the delays, the disappointments——"

The King smiled faintly.

"Yet I have done something——"

"So much!" exclaimed Mary proudly. "But I do long for you to have some leisure now ... for both of us ... to be alone, at last——"

"When the war is over——"

She interrupted gently.

"When the war is over! Alas!" She shook her head. "So long still to wait."

She smiled. ”I would that you had not been a great man, dear—but just a simple citizen.” She laughed charmingly. ”And we would live at The Hague always and have a great garden where you should grow ’La Solitaire’ for the thousand gulden prize—and I would polish all the furniture myself—and I could call you ’Willem’ then before all the world, and we should have long days together ... and you would read of great events in the *Gazette* and never want to mix in them, and I should laugh at those unhappy kings and queens——”

Her husband looked at her in silence.

”So you see I am a good housewife, no more!” she continued, in a kind of wild gaiety. ”Alas, I have no brains for business!”

”I have thought, too,” said William, ”that I would like to be a mere gentleman watching events, not guiding them; but these thoughts are beneath us—and idle visions.”

”Idle visions!” repeated the Queen. ”And you must go to the war again—Death’s target—and I must stay behind and keep my countenance! I am such a poor weak fool!” she added, in bitter self-reproach.

The King raised her head and pressed it against his heart.

”That kind of fool I could never have done without,” he said impetuously. ”If I have ever achieved anything, the credit is to you, my dearest, my dearest——”

He dropped her hand, and abruptly broke his speech.

”What more can I want than to hear you say that?” answered Mary. ”Only love me and I can bear anything——”

The King’s brilliant eyes rested on her pale but smiling face; he spoke slowly, and his tired voice was hoarse and unequal.

”When I was a boy—a youth—I was so proud, so self-confident.... I remember I thought I was capable of anything—I took my inexperience, my handful of soldiers, into the field against France—against Condé! I had been very much alone, and so learnt reserve that I had almost lost the power of expression—I was also very unhappy—I think I had no support in the world but my pride—I thought God had elected me to be his Captain——”

He paused, but Mary did not speak. Only the little gurgle of the unseen fountain broke perfect stillness.

”I remember,” continued William, ”the first time I went to Middleburg and heard the people shout for me—and saw the Town Council bowing.... I never had felt so lonely. Twenty years ago—and I have greatly changed, but in a fashion I have kept the vows I made then to God—I have not turned back from defending His Faith—but that was before He pleased to humble me by constant defeat. I was so confident, Marie! Ah, could I recapture that exaltation of the morning it would all be so easy—I felt so glad of what I had to do—but now!”

He raised his hand lightly and lightly let it fall; his profile was towards the

Queen now, and his gaze directed towards the English hawthorns that showed above the box hedge of the privy garden.

"But though," he added, "it hath all darkened since then, I think God meant me to go on—for He sent you, my wife ... and you are the one thing that hath never failed me."

She hid her face in her hands, and sat trembling; the little tray of blue beads fell from her lap, and they were scattered over the gravel path.

"If I am not good at gratitude," said the King haltingly—"yet believe me—while you are there I can endure anything. After all, there is nothing in the world for me but you and Holland, and while I have both why should I complain of any difficulties?"

Mary raised her face.

"If I could think I made that difference to you!" she said.

"You have given me the best of life," he answered gravely.

CHAPTER IV
THE SECRET ANGUISH

In that ancient palace called Hampton Court, on the banks of the Thames, the Queen of England walked through the rooms that were rebuilding, and tried to subdue her soul to peace.

The King was at the war in Ireland, and she, with the aid of the nine councillors—men divided by personal spites and party differences—was ruling England through a bitter and desperate crisis.

Mary, a woman and utterly unused to business (though she had always taken an intelligent interest in politics), yet found all these men, on whose wisdom she was supposed to rely, peevish and silly. Marlborough was using her sister to stir up opposition against the Government,—she strongly suspected him, Godolphin, and Russell of having made their peace with King James; Caermarthen she personally disliked; the Crone and Fuller plot had proved to be a widespreading affair, in which there appeared every possibility of her uncles being involved; the country was denuded of troops, and the fleet in disorder; the treasury empty, and the French threatening the Channel.

These were the first few moments of leisure the Queen had known since her husband's departure; she was eager to have Hampton Court ready for his return,

and so had come eagerly to see the progress of the rebuilding and alterations.

Here again she was met with difficulties and humiliations. Sir Christopher Wren, the architect, was in want of money, the workmen were unpaid, the contractors refused to deliver any more Portland stone on credit.

Mary had no money, and knew not where to get it; she soothed Sir Christopher as best she could, and desperately resolved that these debts should be paid; the thought of them was an added vexation. She felt there was a kind of meanness in so lacking money, and that the rebuilding of Hampton Court, which had been her one pleasure, was a reproach and a mistake.

M. de Ginckle had written to her from Ireland that they were so straitened in the camp that the King had refused to sign for wine for his own table, and was drinking water with the men.

Mary thought of this passionately as she surveyed the unfinished building the grumblers declared such an unwarranted luxury, and remembered the noble fortune William had lavished on the public cause.

Under some pretence, she slipped away from her ladies and Sir Christopher, and, with a wild longing to be alone, made her way to some of the old deserted Tudor rooms of the palace, opened now for the first time for perhaps fifty years.

In the wing in which Mary found herself there were near a hundred chambers, and she, new to the palace, was soon lost in the maze of apartments.

She was wildly glad to be alone, to drop, for a moment, the mask of composed gaiety that she ever kept over her anxiety.

Door after door she opened, and room after room she traversed, until she reached a little winding stairway that led to a chamber in one of the fine red turrets with the graceful decorated chimney-stacks that Sir Christopher was so calmly destroying.

Stairway and chamber were both covered with thick white dust; the bolts on the door were rusty and loose; there was no furniture save an old rotting chest, rudely carved; but the walls were beautifully panelled with oak in a linen pattern, and the low lancet window disclosed a perfect view.

Mary went straight to it, leant her sick head against the mullions, and gazed over the fair prospect of unkept garden, field, meadow, and river, all shimmering under a July sun. The Thames showed argent gold between banks of willow and alder; stretches of daisies, buttercups, clover, and poppies reached to distant groves of elm, oak, and beech.

In the nearer glades deer wandered in and out of the sweeping shadows, and the air was soft with the whispers of the ringdove.

Such a different England this seemed from that England shown in London, so far removed from war and discord, danger and alarm.

The lonely young Queen felt her own desolation heightened by the soli-

tude; she became almost afraid of the silence.

When she reflected that the person who was everything to her was distant, exposed to many perils, that her father was opposed to him in battle, that the great responsibility of government was intrusted to her, and that she had no one on whom she could rely or even to whom open her heart (for William Bentinck had, after all, been summoned to Holland), she felt a melancholy creep over her spirit that was near despair.

The sun was warm on the sill where her hand rested and on her cheek; she leant a little farther out of the narrow window, that had neither glass nor casement, and fixed her eyes on the pulsing flow of the river.

A little sound behind her caused her to turn quickly with a nervous start.

Before a small worm-eaten inner doorway that she had not noticed stood a comely child of five or six years, gazing at her intently. The colour fluttered into the Queen's face; they stood staring at each other—the woman and the child—as if they were both afraid.

"What are you doing here?" asked Mary coldly, after a second.

The child did not answer; he had as little expected to see this tall young lady in the fine blue gown as she had expected to see him.

"You have no business here," said Mary, in the same tone; "this is private. Go, find your people."

And she turned towards the window again so that she could not see him.

He answered now.

"I have lost my way."

"There are the stairs," said Mary, without looking round. "Go down there, and you will find your way."

There was silence, and she waited a little; then looked over her shoulder to see him still standing there, staring at her.

"Why don't you go?" she asked harshly. "You are not allowed here."

"Yes, ma'am, I am," he replied. "Father said I could go where I liked."

"Who is your father?"

The child laid a delicate finger on the smooth carving of the wall.

"He maketh—these," he explained.

"A carver," said Mary. "Is he working here?"

"Yes, ma'am. We come every day; there is another little boy—you are the mother of the other little boy?" he questioned.

"No," said Mary coldly.

"He isn't here to-day," remarked the child rather sadly. "When he is we go out, because he is a bigger boy than me. If you had been his mother I thought you might have taken me out."

"Your father can take you out."

”Father is working with Master Wren. Do you know Master Wren?”

”Yes.”

”He goeth up and down in a basket outside the house. Once I went too, and he held me so tight that it hurt. He is too old to play with.”

He came a little farther into the room, eying Mary wistfully. She was stately as well as tall, and the high lace commode she wore, and the stiff arrangement of her heavy curls, further added to her dignity. The child looked at her in some awe.

”Are you cross with me?” he asked gravely.

”No,” answered the Queen—”no—but your father will be looking for you—best go and find him.”

”I have lost my way,” he said, subdued by her coldness. ”I was asleep in there.” He pointed to the little sunny annexe to the turret from which he had come. ”I am glad I met you, ma’am.”

”Why?” asked Mary.

The child smiled, in an effort to win her.

”I get frightened when I am alone,” he said. ”Don’t you, ma’am?”

”Sometimes,” answered the Queen; she bit her lip and fixed her narrowed brown eyes on the boy; he was fair, and rather delicate, and wore a shabby suit of red tabinet.

He slowly and reluctantly moved towards the narrow dark stairs.

”I wish this house was finished,” he said plaintively. ”It is so large. The King will live here,” he added. ”I saw the King talking once to Mr. Wren.”

Mary gave him no encouragement to stay, but he still lingered by the rotting door, that swung back against the wall, and looked at her with wide, puzzled eyes.

”I am going now,” he said at last; his hands went to his cravat, which was sadly knotted. ”Would you tie this for me first? Father don’t like me to look untidy.”

”Come here,” said Mary.

He came at once and stood before her.

”I don’t think I can do it,” said the Queen unsteadily.

She took hold of the scrap of cambric awkwardly, while he obediently held his head up; but her cold fingers bungled, and the bow was clumsy.

”I can’t do it,” she murmured.

”You are so tall, ma’am!”

She looked into his upturned face.

”Too tall to be so stupid,” she answered, and untied the bow. ”Have you a mother?” she asked suddenly, holding his shoulder gently.

”No, ma’am.”

”Ah, poor soul!”

She spoke so sadly that he was distressed.

”What is the matter, ma’am?”

”I was thinking of what we both have missed,” said Mary gently.

His bright eyes were bewildered. The Queen drew him to the old chest, seated herself there, and again tied the cravat.

”What is your name?” she asked, as she smoothed it.

”James, ma’am—it was the King his name when I was born,” he added proudly.

Mary drew a quick breath.

”But you serve King William.”

”I know,” he answered dutifully. ”He is a soldier, father saith. I would like to be a soldier, ma’am.”

Mary smiled; though she had done with his cravat she still kept her hands lightly on his shoulder.

”Not a wood-carver?”

He shook his head.

”Father saith, ’Better be a soldier these days—there is no living else,’” he quoted wisely.

”There is time enough to decide,” said Mary softly; her ringed right hand timidly caressed his hair, scarcely touching it. ”Have you many toys?”

”No, ma’am.”

”Do you care for them?”

He considered.

”Books,” he said, with a little frown, ”that you can tear the pictures out of—pictures of fights, ma’am—and blackamoor’s teeth.”

”What are they?” asked Mary, gazing earnestly at him; she spoke with a catch in her breath.

He put his hand into his pocket and produced several cowrie shells.

”There, ma’am—they come from far away.” His eyes glittered. ”It would be good to be a sailor, would it not, ma’am?”

”You are a grave child,” said Mary; she drew him softly nearer to her, and bent her beautiful pale face near to his. ”You pray for the King, do you not?”

”On Sunday, ma’am.”

”Pray for him whenever you say your prayers—and for the Queen.”

He nodded.

”The poor Queen!” he said.

”Why do you say that?” asked Mary, startled.

”Master Wren said those words—like that—’the poor Queen!’ ma’am.”

Mary stared at him intently; her arms tightened about him. Suddenly she pressed him up to her bosom, where his little head rested patiently among her

thick laces.

”The poor Queen!” she whispered wildly, and drew him closer, till he was half frightened by the force of her embrace and the beating of her heart beneath his cheek.

”Oh, ma’am!” he cried, ”I have even dropped the blackamoor’s teeth.”

She let him go, and watched him with desperate eyes while he searched and recovered the gleaming white shells from the dusty floor.

As he busily sought for one in the shadow of the chest, a soft whistle sounded twice; he sprang to his feet at once.

”That is my father—I must go now, ma’am.”

The Queen held out her hands appealingly.

”Will you not kiss me?”

He came obediently and held up his unconscious face.

Mary’s lips touched his brow in the saddest salute he was ever like to know. He did not offer to return it, but made a little bow, and so left her. She sat quite still, listening to the sound of his unequal footsteps departing; then she stooped and picked up the shell he had abandoned.

She fancied that it was still warm and moist from his tight clutch, and as she looked at it the tears veiled her eyes and fell on to her trembling palm.

”O God!” she cried aloud, with a passion that had slipped her control. ”Ye had no right to make childless women!”

She flung the shell from her, and buried her face in her hands, while the painful sobs heaved her body.

She had not long even the comfort of lonely weeping, for the sound of voices and footsteps coming up the narrow stairs caused her to rise heavily, with a start of self-reproach.

It was her secret boast that she had not allowed a tear or a sigh to escape her in public since the King had gone. She dried her poor tired eyes hastily, and bit her lips to steady them, while she thrust her sorrows back into her heart with that placid courage that never failed her. She descended the stairs and faced the people who were, she knew, looking for her.

She was not prepared to see Lord Nottingham, whom she had left at Whitehall; the sight of him among her attendants caused her to pause at the foot of the stairs.

”You, my lord!” she cried faintly.

His dark face showed obvious relief at her appearance.

”I have been searching for Your Majesty,” he said, with some reproach. ”I have ridden hot after Your Majesty from London——”

”There must be grave news,” said Mary, knowing that otherwise he would not have come himself.

”There is, Madam—the gravest.”

Mary raised her head; she was perfectly composed.

”From—the King?” she asked.

”No, Madam.”

Mary smiled superbly.

”Then it is not the worst.” She was colourless to the lips, but bore herself with majesty. ”What is it, my lord?”

Nottingham was always tragical in his discourse, and now his face and tone were gloomy in the extreme.

”Madam, M. de Waldeck and the allies have been defeated at Fleurus, M. de Tourville and the French fleet have been spied under full sail for the coast of Devon. There is no relying on our sailors—there is a panic in the city.”

The Queen’s eyes flashed with something of her husband’s look when fronted with disaster.

”We will to London,” she said—”there to face these misfortunes.”

CHAPTER V
A WOMAN’S STRENGTH

The council of nine was sitting at Whitehall waiting for news from the English Fleet, which, under command of Lord Torrington, had sailed out from Plymouth to meet the French.

The Queen sat at the head of the table, as usual silent and as usual watchful; at her right hand Lord Caermarthen, at her left Lord Devonshire, the others along the table, and at the foot Sir John Lowther.

The room was very handsome: the walls of varied-coloured tapestry, the cornices of gilt wood, and the floor covered with rugs from Persia. Through the tall, majestic window might be seen a view of housetops and a little turret with a bell clear against a sky of flaming summer blue.

Mary was seated in a heavy chair with crimson cushions; she wore a violet dress of stiff damask satin and a petticoat flounced with lace; her arms were covered to the wrist with ruffles of muslin, and she held a long chicken skin fan with ivory mounts and an emerald in the handle; her shortsighted and narrowed eyes dwelt anxiously and critically on the faces of these men in whose hands she, and England, lay.

Facing her, Sir John Lowther, commonplace, courtly, agitated, was stabbing the polished table with a broken quill; to his left sat Edward Russell, impatient, blond, swaggering; to his right, Pembroke, gentle, hesitating, reserved. Godolphin, thin and hectic, was, as ever, mute and self-effacing; his companion was the restless, feverish, and volatile Monmouth, extravagantly dressed and fiery in manner.

Opposite him sat the gloomy honourable Nottingham, and another man, an object of peculiar dislike and suspicion both to the King and Queen, John Churchill, recently created Earl of Marlborough.

Of all the company he was the most remarkable in appearance—young, tall, of extreme good looks, though florid and flamboyant in type, of a calm, easy, and courtly demeanour, but obviously not an aristocrat nor anything of a great gentleman, but rather of a kind of vulgarity, even in his richly coloured beauty, and in that different to the other ministers, who were all of noble appearance; he was dressed in scarlet silk and wore a very rich sword-belt; he sat opposite the window, and the sunlight made his splendour glitter.

My Lord Devonshire was of another and more winning type of handsomeness; his young face was refined and delicate in feature, yet expressed an ardent strength and a proud decision; he looked continually at the Queen, and seemed, with the exception of Caermarthen, to be the only one who had much sympathy or regard for her position.

"The conspirators——" began Nottingham heavily. He was drawing up a list of the suspected names; he had industrious spies, as the Whigs had found to their cost.

"Well, my lord?" asked Godolphin imperturbable. He had made his peace with King James himself, but was calm in the knowledge that he had been far too cunning to leave evidence of it in anybody's hands.

Nottingham pursed his lips; he added a name to his list, and handed the paper with a significant look to Russell, who shrugged and passed it on to Monmouth.

"These are people to be put under arrest, are they not?" asked that nobleman.

"Yes," said Nottingham dryly. "Shall I leave that last name?"

The paper was now in Lord Marlborough's hands; he smiled serenely, and put up his glass.

Mary spoke, and her woman's voice sounded strangely in the council chamber.

"What is this name?"

Marlborough inclined with great deference towards her.

"The Earl of Clarendon, Your Majesty."

The other councillors were silent; he was the Queen's uncle, and even the most callous of them felt some pity for her dilemma. Devonshire cast an indignant look on Marlborough, whom he hated, but nothing could put that gentleman out of countenance.

"I will erase the name," muttered Nottingham.

The Queen put out her hand in a gesture to stay him.

"No, my lord. I know," she said, with great dignity, "and you all know, that my Lord Clarendon is far too guilty to be left out."

"A wise decision, Your Majesty," remarked Marlborough calmly.

She set her lips in disdain of him, and turned to the haggard Lord President on her right. She had never liked Caermarthen, even though she owed her marriage largely to him, but she softened to him now; since the King's departure he had worked incessantly. He was in extreme ill-health, and she believed he was loyal.

"My lord," she said, "should we not soon have news from Lord Torrington? It is twenty-four hours since he had our orders to fight."

"We are better waiting for that news than listening to it, Your Majesty," said Admiral Russell bluntly.

Mary knew that he was largely inspired by professional jealousy.

"Oh, sir," she answered, "we will have more trust in the man on whom the fate of three kingdoms dependeth."

"Madam," said Lord Devonshire, "I do not think Lord Torrington a man to be intrusted with the fate of three kingdoms."

Mary answered with animation.

"That censure hath been passed before, my lord—and at the privy council—but since we must trust my lord let us pray God he will not fail us."

"He would not like those orders to fight," exclaimed Edward Russell, who had been the main means of sending them. "A cautious man!"

"One who was not cautious should have been sent to urge him!" cried Monmouth, who was angry that his entreaty to be permitted to join the fleet had been refused.

Mary pressed her fan to her lips and sat mute; in truth, the agony she endured was not to be soothed with words. Her whole being was strung for the arrival of the next letters, not only from Torrington, who was now the sole defence of England, but from Ireland, where she knew her father and husband were rapidly approaching face to face.

"Maybe," said the Lord President, "Torrington never got Your Majesty's dispatch——"

Monmouth, who was discussing with Godolphin the details of Fuller's confession (that conspirator having turned informer to save his neck), swung round

violently in his seat.

"Dear Lord!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean that he may be still idle at St. Helens?"

"It may be—the advice packets last reported that he had not moved, and that M. de Tourville was beyond the Needles."

"Oh, were I on board," cried Monmouth, "there should be a battle—I pledge my life on it!"

Mary was perfectly pale; she still held her fan to her lips and sat silent, so motionless that it seemed as if she scarcely breathed.

"He had positive orders to fight," said Godolphin.

"Oh, my lord," answered Marlborough sweetly, "is it not believed that this invasion is in concert with these plots among the malcontents?"

"Do you mean that Lord Torrington is a traitor?" asked Caermarthen bluntly; he gave Marlborough a glance that conveyed he thought him one.

The Queen dropped her fan and clenched it tightly in her right hand.

"Gentlemen, this is no time for these insinuations, with the enemy on the coast. We," she said proudly and courageously—"we trust all those in our service, and have faith in God who hath it all in His keeping."

She paused; the effort of speaking had brought the colour into her face, her eyes sparkled, and the western sunlight trembled in her auburn hair. They waited silently, watching her with curiosity and some judgment. She was principally conscious of the malignant smiling eyes of my Lord Marlborough.

"This is our decision," she continued, with unfaltering voice—"that Admiral Russell and my Lord Monmouth go down to the coast, and there join the fleet, and give our commands to Lord Torrington that, for the honour of England, he fight the French, whom he must now outnumber since his juncture with the Dutch. My lords, the council is over."

It was the first time that she had given her commands to her advisers, almost the first time she had announced her opinion on their discussions; but she left them no chance to doubt that she meant what she said; she had the manner of Kings.

"Let these disloyal subjects," she added, pointing to Lord Nottingham's list, "be at once lodged in the Tower."

She rose, gave her hand to Lord Caermarthen, and descended from her high chair with a soft heavy sound of silks.

"England is Your Majesty's debtor," said Lord Devonshire, bowing low.

She answered with her sweet stateliness.

"I do what a woman can, my lord."

"Your Majesty doth what few women would," said Caermarthen warmly; he had for her a real and deep devotion.

She turned as if she would have rebuked his compliment, but checked herself at sight of his worn and ghastly face, livid with fatigue and anxiety.

”I am like your lordship,” she answered kindly, ”I am fond of my country.”

He coloured with pleasure, and bent over her fine hand.

”Now I must go wait for letters.” She smiled and left them with her usual little formal salutation.

Devonshire looked round at the other councillors.

”There is more courage in that lady than in most of us,” he said gently. ”I did mark the tears lying in her eyes even while she smiled.”

”She will need her courage,” answered Caermarthen briefly; ”for seldom hath the country been in the pass it is now.”

Mary had gone no farther than the antechamber with the French tapestries and crystal candelabra when she was met by the news that the Duke of Shrewsbury required an immediate audience.

Her face hardened; she could not forgive Shrewsbury either his secret treachery or the vexation he had caused the King by his sudden resignation; she hesitated, then commanded his presence.

When he entered she was standing before the great gilt mantelpiece, very cold and contained.

”What is the reason of your coming, my lord?” she said.

His gentle face was flecked with feverish colour in the cheeks, he drew his breath sharply, his riding-suit was dusty; indeed, he was spent with rapid riding.

”Madam,” he answered, ”upon this news—that M. de Tourville rode at the Isle of Wight—I am come at once to London to offer Your Majesty my services—my sword——”

”You, my lord!” exclaimed Mary.

”Madam,” he said, ”for the second time all I have is at the service of His Majesty.”

She looked at him steadily; she could not doubt his sincerity. He was again the man he had been in ’88. Danger struck a fine spirit out of him, she thought, and she the more deplored his miserable defection of late.

”Ah, my lord,” she said sadly, ”when His Majesty wished for your services you refused them——”

”Then,” cried Shrewsbury, ”the French were not on the coasts.”

She saw in his eagerness a desperate remorseful desire to make atonement, and further softened.

”I am in such a strait that I can refuse no offers,” she said; ”but, sir, I have no work for you.”

”Send me to the Fleet, Madam—put me under my Lord Marlborough with the army. I will serve as a volunteer—as anything——”

”Had you shown this spirit before His Majesty went to Ireland I had been more grateful,” Mary replied gently. ”But I am glad to know of your loyalty, my lord.”

”Madam, this is an urgent crisis—there is almost an open panic—as I rode up from Epsom, the people came running out of their cottages crying that the French were coming; in the country all are looking out their arms——”

The Queen interrupted.

”Some, I fear, with the design of joining the invader.”

”Why, God forbid!” he cried.

”I have commanded the Guards down to Devon to seize the arms and houses of suspect persons,” said Mary quietly; ”and to-night, my lord, all the leaders of this Fuller plot will be in prison—yea, even to my Lord Clarendon.”

”Ah!” exclaimed Shrewsbury sharply.

Mary fixed him with a proud but kind gaze.

”There are many others whose guilt I know who have not been arrested,” she said slowly.

The young Duke pressed his hand to the embroidered ruffles over his bosom.

”Why is Your Majesty thus tender with these—traitors?” he asked, in a trembling voice.

”It is my policy,” she answered quietly. ”I am only a woman, and must trust to instinct. My lord, I will ask your advice about this matter.”

”My advice?” he stammered, very pale.

”Yes. Supposing a great nobleman who had finely served His Majesty in ’88—one whom His Majesty loved and trusted—had, in a moment of weakness, of temptation, betrayed him, and then, being remorseful, I think, left his service—supposing, I say, that this gentleman came forward now, with offers of help, should I not trust him?”

Shrewsbury stood mute.

”I think I should,” said Mary softly. ”He is an English gentleman, and he would not take advantage of my great difficulties to intrigue against me; he would not take advantage of my confidence to lead his people to join the French—am I not right?”

The Duke raised his head; his face was pitifully trembling.

”Your Majesty’s generosity would not be misplaced,” he answered hoarsely.

”I am glad you think so, my lord. I may trust him, then?”

”I pledge my life you may,” said Shrewsbury ardently.

”Thank you, my lord—I shall find you at your town house?”

”I shall wait there to receive the commands of Your Majesty.”

Mary moved a little from the mantelpiece and held out her hand.

Shrewsbury went on one knee to kiss the soft fingers.

"I hope to see you at court once more," she said, with a pretty smile. "I hope you will serve the King again when we are through this difficult pass."

He answered from his heart—

"I would serve His Majesty with my life."

When he had gone Mary went to the window, for the light was beginning to fade, and drew from her waist a crystal watch enamelled with white violets.

It was nearly time for her supper. She resided now at Whitehall to please the people, and to please the people dined nearly always in public, a practice the King detested and could scarcely ever be brought to do; that penance was over for to-day, but she had other disagreeable duties to perform.

She rang the handbell on an ormolu bureau between the windows, and asked the Dutch usher who came if Lord Feversham was without.

He had, it seemed, been long awaiting an audience.

The Queen commanded him to be brought to her, and seated herself in the yellow brocade chair to the right of the fireplace.

Lord Feversham, a Frenchman, a Catholic, and Chamberlain of the Dowager Queen Catherine's household, entered with a most lowly obeisance.

Mary looked at him haughtily.

"You can guess the matter on which we have sent for you?" she asked, speaking in French.

"I fear I have again fallen under Your Majesty's displeasure."

"Both you and your mistress are very much in our displeasure," answered Mary. "It was our duty to reprimand you three days ago for leaving out the prayers for the success of His Majesty in the services held in Her Majesty's chapel, and we listened for near an hour to your excuses, nor could make much sense of them. And now the offence is repeated."

"I entreat Your Majesty to believe that it was an oversight," answered Feversham humbly.

"Disloyalty and insolence prompts such oversights," flashed the Queen. "We will not take it, my lord; for though we may be meek, yet we stand for His Sovereign Lord the King. Tell Queen Catherine so, and bid her to-night put up prayers for the success of my Lord Torrington against our enemies the French——"

Feversham winced, and stole a startled glance at the woman he had believed to be an amiable cipher; the young beauty's demeanour as she sat stately and resolved in her regal gown undeceived him.

"When we rode abroad in Hyde Park to-day," she continued, "we did note many swarming villains, French and Irish, who gave us impertinent and joyous looks as if they did anticipate a triumph, and maybe Her Majesty thinketh also

that she may do as she list now M. de Tourville is in the Channel. But we have no fear of any kind as to the issue of these matters, nor shall we be weak. Some great men will lie in the Tower to-night. Bid your mistress take care."

She rose, and her full height, with heels and head-dress, was more than his. He made as if to speak.

"There is no more to say," she said coldly, and left him discomfited.

No news came, but many rumours found their way into the crowded galleries at Whitehall, where the anxious courtiers waited and endeavoured to read the situation in the Queen's face and manner.

She baffled them all, both at her supper-table and afterwards, when she sat down to basset as usual in that splendid hall where King Charles had held his festivals. She was gay and gracious and unconcerned—some even thought her unfeeling. She appeared to notice nothing; but her eyes and ears were quick for it all—the whispers, the looks, the ill-concealed fears and hopes.

She was, she knew, absolutely alone; not one of the throng about her could she confide in, and very few could she trust. She suspected that many of them were but waiting for a slackening of her courage to call all lost and hasten to make their peace with James; ill news from the Fleet or from Ireland might mean instant rebellion, she was well aware.

Meanwhile she played basset and made no mistake in her moves.

When it was near ten of the clock Lord Nottingham entered the room. The Queen's eyes at once distinguished him among the crowd.

She continued dealing the cards. When he approached her she looked up with a steady smile.

Her lips shaped the one word—

"News?"

He placed a dispatch on the card-table beside her fan and gloves. She saw at once that it was not from Ireland, and she drew a breath between relief and disappointment.

Her glance went swiftly round the faces now undisguisedly watching her, and then she broke the seal.

While she read her bosom heaved, and those nearest her saw the colour faintly stain her face.

She folded up the letter and rose. The ace of spades fell from her lap to the shining floor.

There was a pause of silence. Mary's eyes were the eyes of a creature at bay.

"This is evil news," she said, at length, to Lord Nottingham, and a proud little smile curved her lips.

She had just read that Lord Torrington had been utterly defeated off Beachy

Head by the French, who were landed at Tynemouth.

"What will Your Majesty do?" he asked, under his breath. "The courier saith the enemy is in possession of the west——"

She crushed up Lord Torrington's letter in a passionate right hand; she saw that his defeat had been inglorious. The Dutch had been in the van all day and were near annihilated; the English, mere spectators, had drawn off to Plymouth almost untouched.

"The French are landed," she said, "but we English will not let them far advance. I will call upon the city of London. Summon to me the Lord Mayor."

CHAPTER VI
GOD SAVE THE QUEEN!

On the evening of the fourth day after the defeat at Beachy Head, the Queen, who would abate none of her state during this time of anxiety, but rather kept it more splendidly, as a besieged general will hang out all his flags when his garrison becomes scant, so as to defy and deceive the enemy, held court in the most sumptuous gallery of Whitehall.

The land was full of panic, of terror, of mistrust, but the spirit of the people had risen to the need. The city of London had responded finely to the Queen's appeal; a hundred thousand pounds had been paid into the treasury, she had to-day reviewed the train-bands in Hyde Park and received an address assuring her of the loyalty of the capital.

The spirit she showed made her suddenly popular. The distant King and the Dutch were viewed with more favour. Hatred of the French was an emotion powerful enough to overcome all lesser dislikes, and the whole nation, Whig and Tory, Protestant and Catholic, shook with rage at the part Lord Torrington had made the British navy play.

It was apparent to all the world that he, irritated by orders he conceived were devised by his rival Russell, had sacrificed the Dutch, whom he believed were so unpopular that no outcry would be raised at their destruction, to the English.

Admiral Evertgen, the admiral of the States, had, with heroic valour, fought his ships all day long against the overwhelming armament of France, while the English fleet looked on, and only came forward at nightfall to tow the disabled

Dutch hulks away and destroy them at Plymouth.

Popular fury rose high. The London crowd would gladly have torn Torrington limb from limb. Mary sent him to the Tower and dispatched a special envoy to the States with the best and most flattering apology she could devise; her very blood burnt with shame that her husband's people should be thus sacrificed and her own behave so basely; she ordered the wounded Dutch seamen to be tended in the English hospitals, and wrote a letter of compliment to the gallant Evertgen.

She had, in every direction, done what she could, and the spirit of England had responded; but the situation was still acute, might yet turn to utter disaster, and though people might shout for her in the street, there was little but enmity, jealousy, and opposition among those by whom she was personally surrounded.

Even her own sister was under the influence of the Marlboroughs, her enemy, and the Catholic Queen Dowager had no love for her; it was these two women she was watching as she sat in her lonely weariness beneath a candelabra of fifty coloured candles.

Anne, beautiful, but stout and sullen, lacking all vivacity and charm, was making knots near the gilt chair of the little dark Portuguese lady who had been the wife of the second Charles.

Catherine very seldom came to court, and would not have been there now, as Mary reflected with a swelling heart, had the last news been of victory instead of defeat.

The Princess, who lost no opportunity of vexing her sister, was attired in the free and gorgeous costume of the last two reigns, in defiant contrast to the decorous modes the Queen had made fashionable, and Catherine of Braganza wore a stiff farthingale of brown brocade sewn with pearls.

Presently Anne, becoming aware that Mary was watching her, broke into challenging laughter, which rang false enough at this juncture.

Mary hung her head; it seemed terrible that the wretched family divisions to which she had been forced to be a party should be increased by this breach between her only sister and herself. On a sudden impulse she sent her new maid of honour, Basilea de Marsac, with a message requesting Anne's company.

The Princess tossed her head and came reluctantly; she was at no pains whatever to conceal her rebellious attitude towards the throne.

Mary greeted her gently.

"It would be more fitting if you would give me some of your company, Anne; Queen Catherine's sentiments are well noised abroad—you need not—laugh—with her at such a time."

Anne sank down on the other end of the settee; the ladies behind the Queen withdrew, leaving the sisters alone; the musicians were playing a monotonous little march in the gallery.

”We should display a united front now,” continued Mary unsteadily.

”I don’t know what you mean, Madam,” answered Anne almost insolently; she never used any manner of respect to the Queen; she considered that she was of as much importance; she never ceased to flaunt that she was the mother of the child who would be the future King of England.

Mary gazed at her pouting, overblown comeliness with sad eyes.

”You will not understand,” she answered. ”You take a pleasure in doing everything contrary to what I do——”

Anne smoothed her grey satin skirt with a plump white hand.

”Our tastes are different,” she said.

Mary was silent. Anne kept her languid eyes downcast, then jerked out—

”I have writ to the King for the vacant Garter for my Lord Marlborough. I hope Your Majesty will use your influence?”

Mary coloured hotly.

”You have writ to the King in Ireland on such a matter?”

”And so hath the Prince. It is allowable to write to the King, I hope?”

”You should have spoken to me first,” answered Mary, with trembling lips. ”I have no mind that the King should be vexed with these things. I do not think he meaneth the Garter for Lord Marlborough.”

Anne flung up her head with a force that set her huge pearl earrings quivering.

”And who better deserveth it, I should like to know? I suppose it is meant for Lord Portland, or some other Dutchman?”

”Anne, you are infatuate to speak so. The services of my Lord Marlborough have been well rewarded.”

At that Anne burst out with what had evidently been her secret grievance.

”He is slighted on every possible occasion—’tis he who should have reviewed the militia this afternoon!”

Mary turned angrily.

”This is my Lady Marlborough her doing; she put this into your head, Anne, and it is too much.”

”Yes, it is too much,” answered Anne, ”that Your Majesty should have such a dislike to my friend.”

”Her insolence,” exclaimed Mary, ”is beyond all bearing. I have it on good report that she hath spoken of the King with great disrespect.”

”She ain’t the only one if she hath,” retorted Anne. ”His Majesty ain’t so popular——”

”I command you stop,” said Mary, in a cold tone of deep anger.

Anne submitted sulkily.

”La, I meant no harm.”

”You go too far,” answered Mary in a low controlled tone. ”His Majesty thinketh it ungenerous to quarrel with a woman, or your behaviour would have been put a stop to before. I, perhaps, shall not be so long enduring. I cannot and will not take the defiance of my Lady Marlborough—no, nor your incivility either, Anne.”

”I don’t suppose Your Majesty would hesitate to clap me up if you dared,” said Anne, lashed by the attack on her favourite. ”There is one of your relations in the Tower, and where the uncle is the sister may follow; but I warn Your Majesty that I have the Parliament behind me——”

Again Mary interrupted.

”Leave me until you can command yourself.”

Anne hesitated, but the music that had screened their talk had ceased, and beyond a point Mary always quelled her. She rose, courtsied haughtily, and withdrew to the other end of the gallery, where Lady Marlborough—a gorgeous blonde shrew with a vulgar voice—was playing comet with Prince George for partner.

Mary closed her eyes for a second. This sordid quarrel with her sister, mainly based on demands for money, was the last bitterness of her position; she had tried every means of conciliation in vain. Lady Marlborough’s hold on her puppet was too firm, and Anne but took advantage of any kindness from the Queen to press for an addition to her already huge allowance.

The violins played a gavotte. Mary sat motionless, listening to the subdued volume of talk by which she was surrounded, and thinking of that far-distant day when she had danced with her husband in this very room—a week or so before her marriage.

She recalled how she had enjoyed dancing, and wondered to think how dead that passion was.

”I used to think,” she thought, ”that a dance measure would lure me from my grave, and now the gayest melody written will not move me.”

She gazed over her shoulder at her reflection in the tall mirror against the wall to the left; she beheld a fair image, in yellow silk and diamonds, with a very proud carriage. A Queen, young and beautiful—the description sounded like a favoured creature from one of those fairy tales she used to read; she knew the reality—a tired woman, unutterably lonely, estranged from all her family, childless, and forlorn.

Queen Catherine came to take her leave.

”No news yet from Ireland?” she asked, in her awkward English.

Mary courteously rose before the woman who had been Queen in Whitehall when she was a child.

”None, Madam.”

The Queen Dowager hesitated a moment, then said—

"I have not failed of late to put up prayers for His Majesty's good success."

"I thank you, Madam."

Catherine of Braganza pulled at her curling feather fan and laughed.

"We are both in a strange position, are we not?"

"The positions God put us in," said Mary coldly. She wondered why the other woman paused to talk.

The Queen Dowager continued to smile over her fan.

"I think to go back to Portugal."

"That must be as Your Majesty pleaseth."

"England is no longer the same to me."

Mary's hand tightened on the rich back of the settle. She read perfectly well the scorn of the Stewart's wife for the usurper and the Protestant.

"I find Whitehall a little dull," continued Catherine, with a malicious twist of her lip. "Geneva bands and black coats are a strange sight in these halls——"

"Certainly they were not seen here in the days of my Lady Portsmouth," flashed Mary.

The little Portuguese winced slightly, but ignored the thrust.

"I do not blame Your Majesty," she said. "You are not so fortunate in your court as I was; the Dutch," she raised her thin shoulders in a shrug, "do not make the best of courtiers——"

"No," answered Mary impetuously; "but they make good husbands, Madam."

Catherine made no attempt to turn this hit. She put her hand to her dark throat, and her large melancholy eyes filled with tears. She answered the thought and not the words.

"I cared as much as you do, all the same;" she said, "and I shall always be a Jacobite for his—worthless—sake."

"Forgive me," murmured Mary instantly. "I had no right. But do you be charitable. I am in great trouble, Madam, and very much alone."

Catherine lifted her small olive face with a kind of defiant brightness.

"We have that loneliness in common, Madam. If you or I had an heir it would have all been different. I shall say a mass for your husband his safety. Good night, Your Majesty."

She swept her grave foreign courtsey and retired, followed by her silent duennas. Mary stood pressing her handkerchief to her lips, and felt the whole pageant of people, lights, speech, music, swing past her like reflections on troubled water—broken, scattered without substance or meaning.

No news came.

She dismissed the Court presently and went to her rooms; it was late, long

past ten o'clock, yet she would not go to bed, but sat in her cabinet writing to the King. Sheet after sheet she covered with news, hopes, fears, love, entreaties for God's blessings—all her heart indeed laid out before her one confidant.

The candlelight hurt her eyes, weaker of late with work and tears, and at last she folded up the letter unfinished. The express did not go till the morning, and she hoped that by then she might have the long-looked-for news from Ireland.

When she rose from her desk she was utterly tired, yet could not rest—there was so much to do.

Her letter to Admiral Evertgen, which she had written with great pains in Dutch, had been returned as unintelligible, and now she must write again in English, which language the Admiral understood perfectly, it seemed. There was the question of the command of the Fleet on her mind; Russell and Monmouth had been met at Canterbury by the news of the disaster of Beachy Head, and now were back in London, hot against Torrington; Mary feared that the King would be vexed with her for having let them leave the council, yet she must again send some one to the Fleet, now without a commander. Her choice had fallen on Pembroke, who was an admiral, and Devonshire, whom she could trust, and thereupon Caermarthen had taken umbrage, and it had been a weary work of tact and sweetness to prove to him that he was indispensable in London and could not be spared—yet perhaps she had been wrong, and she should have let him go.

All these lesser anxieties crowded on her weary soul, aching with the desire for news from the King, and, as she left her cabinet and came into her bedchamber, a profound melancholy overthrew her gallant spirit.

Only two of her ladies were up—Madame de Marsac and Madame Nienhuys. Mary told them to go to bed, and cast herself into the window-seat and pulled the curtains apart from before the windows open on the warm soft night.

"It is Your Majesty who should go to bed," said Madame Nienhuys firmly.

Mary shook her head.

"I cannot. I cannot sleep until I get a letter."

"You neither sleep nor eat," protested the Dutch lady.

"I am very well," smiled Mary sadly. "Go to bed, like a good creature——"

"Indeed, Madam, I will not leave you in this state."

"Have you been with me so long that you become disobedient? Very well, put out some of the candles—the light hurts my eyes."

Basilea de Marsac rose softly and extinguished all the candles, save those on the mantelshelf. The large rich chamber was full of grateful shadow. Mary's yellow gown gleamed secretively like gold through a veil.

She took the diamonds from her neck and arms and gave them to Madame

Nienhuys. She pulled off her rings slowly, and dropped them into her lap, looking the while out on to the July dark, that seemed to her to be painted with the menacing forces of war, flags, banners hanging bloody to their poles, the hot, smoking mouths of cannon, the glitter of armour through the dust—her husband's army and her father's struggling together to the death.

She rose so suddenly that the rings fell and rolled all over the floor.

"I think I will go to bed after all," she said faintly.

They undressed her in silence and left her wide-eyed in the great crimson bed, canopied and plumed and enriched with the arms of England.

When they had gone she lay for a while quite still. There was no moon, and she could not distinguish a single object in the room, and only uncertainly the dim spaces of the window.

All that had seemed small, petty, and wretched in the daytime seemed a thousand times more mean and unworthy now. She was haunted by the stiff little figure of Queen Catherine, whose personality had suddenly flashed out on her, by the fair sullen image of Anne, and the vulgar enmity of Lady Marlborough. She was tortured by the idea that she had done everything wrong....

She sat up in bed and locked her hands over her heart.

"I must not despair—God will not let me despair," she clung to that word, "God—ah, He knoweth best—He seeth what man cannot see—therefore He did not give me children, knowing I could not have endured this if their safety had been at stake."

The Palace clock struck one. Like an echo came the bell of the Abbey Church, then the dead silence again.

The Queen rose from her bed and made her way lightly to the dressing-table. After a little fumbling she found the tinderbox and struck a light.

The silver table, the enamel, jade, and gold boxes glittered into points of light. In the depths of the mirror she saw her own face lit by the little flame she held.

It flared out between her cold fingers. She struck another and lit one of the tall candles in the red copper stands.

By the dim wavering light she found her scarlet shoes and a little mantle of fox's fur that she put on over her muslin night-dress. She then took up the candlestick, which was so heavy that it made her wrist shake, and quietly left the room, which opened into the cabinet.

Here she paused at the red lac desk, unlocked it with the gold key she wore round her neck, and took out a packet tied with orange ribbon.

These were the letters she had received from the King since his departure. She looked at them tenderly, took up her candle again, and passed on through an antechamber to a private door that led straight into the chapel.

Her feeble light gave her glimpses of the lofty walls panelled in cedar wood, the majestic altar of white marble gilt, and the great painting brought from Italy—all heavenly blue, and deep crimson, and angelic faces breaking from rosy clouds.

Mary went to the altar steps, set the candle on the topmost one, then fell on her knees with her letters pressed to her heart.

As she prayed she bent lower and lower till her beautiful head touched the marble, and there it rested while she sobbed out her humble prayers for her husband, her father, for England, for her own poor tired soul.

She grew cold as she lay across the altar steps, and peaceful in her heart. She thought God was not so displeased with her; a confidence rose in her bosom that he would not let His cause fail though her weakness....

A gentle confusion came over her senses, and she fell into a kind of swoon; when this passed she found that her candle had burnt to the socket and gone out, and that a blue dawn was lighting the glowing arms of England in the painted glass windows.

She got to her feet, shivering but calm, and went back stealthily through the vast silent rooms, filled with the early sun, and so reached her bed; and, for the first time for weeks, fell placidly asleep. Next morning when she woke she was very silent; but, as her ladies thought, more at ease.

She had hidden her letters under her pillow, and when she was dressed slipped them into her gown.

As she left her apartments on the way to the chapel she was met by Lord Nottingham.

The news from Ireland at last!

"The King is safe, Madam," said my lord, in pity of her face.

She stood speechless; those about her were little less moved. The silence hung heavy.

"His late Majesty is also safe," added my lord delicately.

She spoke then.

"I—I thank you."

She tore open her letters, but could not read them.

"Oh, tell me, sir," she said hoarsely.

"Madam, the King hath had a great victory at Boyne Water. Ireland is conquered."

Even as he spoke the bells broke out from a thousand steeples and the guns of the Tower boomed triumph.

"The news is just abroad," said Nottingham.

Mary flushed into a glorious exaltation.

"The *King* hath redeemed us all!" she cried, with inexpressible pride. "The *King* hath saved us!"

”Not the King alone, Madam,” answered my lord, with a flush on his shallow face—”listen to these——”

From without came the sound of wild joyous murmurs from the crowd that had gathered to hear the news. As it sped from mouth to mouth a frenzy of relief and triumph shook the people. They burst into one shout that drowned the cannon and the bells—

”Long live the Queen! God save and bless the Queen!”

CHAPTER VII
THE SHADOW

Mr. Matthew Prior, Private Secretary to the Earl of Portland, was enjoying the winter sunshine in the gardens of Hampton Court Palace.

It was the year 1694, and near Christmas. Many vast events had taken place since the young poet had been first introduced to the Court by my Lord Dorset—plots, counter-plots, change of ministers, of parliaments, the defeat of Landen and Steinkirk, the great victory at La Hogue, the loss of the Smyrna Fleet, four bloody campaigns, four winters of gloom, depression, and internal convulsion, and still, as by a kind of miracle, the two lonely princes ruling England maintained their station and kept their faces calmly to their enemies.

Mr. Prior was a grateful soul; he adored the King and worshipped the Queen; he had berhymed both copiously, and was ever ready to use his sword or his wit in their behalf. The last of the King’s unending differences with the Parliament was on the matter of the Triennial Bill, and Mr. Prior had his tablets on his knee and his pencil in his hand.

He was engaged in composing a pamphlet in defence of His Majesty’s action in firmly refusing to curtail the regal authority by passing an Act that permitted no parliament to sit longer than three years.

But it was cold, and the neat little secretary found his fingers too stiff to write. He returned his papers to his pocket, rose, and walked on briskly.

Both palace and grounds were now very noble, being designed closely after the King’s house at Loo: trees, thirty-five years old, had been transplanted either side of a wide canal that had been cut opposite the Palace; beds were shaped, walks laid down, shrubs cut after the Dutch style; every endeavour had been used to make the place as much like Holland as possible. Even now, in mid-

winter, topiary art had preserved monstrous box hedges and bushes in the shape of windmills, birds, and animals.

The day was cloudy, but the sun streamed through in a fine gold light on the splendid front of the Palace, still unfinished but very imposing.

Mr. Prior turned to the left, where was the privy garden directly beneath the royal apartments, and the covered walk where the Queen would sit in summer with her ladies, sewing and reading. There, too, was a small sunk Dutch garden, with a fountain in the centre and tiled paths, bare now of everything save a few evergreens, but in the spring a mass of blooms from Holland.

Here walked two ladies and a gentleman, all muffled in furs, and talking together with some earnestness.

Mr. Prior took off his hat; he recognized the Queen, his patron, the Earl of Portland, and Lady Temple. He was passing respectfully on when Mary called to him.

He came up to her, and she paused to speak to him.

"My lord tells me you are just returned from The Hague?" questioned Mary.

"Yes, Madam."

"I envy you," said the Queen wistfully; "it is, Mr. Prior, such a dream with me to see The Hague again."

The ardent little poet thought he had never seen her look so beautiful. There was an almost unnatural lustre in her eyes, an almost unnatural brightness on her lip and cheek; the fresh wind had stirred the auburn hair from her brow, and the fitful sunlight touched it to sparkles of red gold.

"The Hague liveth only in hopes of one day seeing Your Majesty," he answered. "You are most extraordinarily beloved there, Madam."

"They were always very good to me," said Mary simply. "I still feel an exile here—but you must not breathe that, Mr. Prior," she added almost instantly.

"Are you returning to Holland?"

"Very soon, Madam."

"Well," smiled Mary, "I hope that when next I see you it may be at my house in The Hague—for I have good hopes that I may be free to go there soon. Let me at least flatter myself so."

She dismissed him kindly and continued her walk, keeping her gloved hand affectionately on Lady Temple's arm.

"What is this of the Duke of Leeds?" she asked Portland.

"They say he is to be impeached in the new Parliament, Madam, for taking money from the East India Company."

Mary frowned.

"That is a hit at me," added Portland calmly.

"And at the King," she said proudly. "There is no end to the spite of these

people. Heard you also that Sir John Dalrymple must go for the Glencoe affair?"

"If the Parliament had their way, it would be his head and not his place he lost."

"It seemeth to have been a cruel thing," said Mary, "if it is true? But I am sorry for the Duke of Leeds (Danby he always is to me) for he has been a faithful servant."

"The King would like to employ Sunderland, who lieth quiet at Althorp," said Portland, with some bitterness. "A villain if there ever was one!"

Mary glanced at him anxiously.

"The King doth not love Sunderland," she said, "but might find him useful."

"Will he persuade His Majesty to pass the Triennial Bill?" asked Lady Temple.

"No man can do that," answered the Queen. "If any could have done it, it would have been your lord, a year ago—but nothing will move the King once his mind is resolved." She laughed, and added, "You both have known him longer than I have—tell me if you ever knew him change his decision?"

"Never," said Portland. "When he was a child he was immovable."

"Sir William hath wasted eloquence on him more than once," smiled Lady Temple.

The sun had suddenly gone in, and a greyness overspread the gardens.

"Let us go in," said Mary.

They entered the Palace by the private door that led to the King's apartments. Portland prepared to leave for Whitehall, where His Majesty stayed to open the Parliament, and the two ladies went to the Queen's great gallery, that was fine and beautifully furnished, though but ill heated by the one fireplace where the pine logs blazed.

They joined the little company gathered about the fire and protected by tall lacquer and silk screens.

Mary took off her furs and drew close to the flames. She was shivering violently.

"The room is too large," she said, "but a noble apartment, is it not?"

She had taken great pride in furnishing Hampton Court and Kensington House, and in introducing and making fashionable the arts and crafts of Holland—the pottery, the brass-ware, the painted wood, and wrought silver.

The ladies answered in eager praises. The Queen's modest court now consisted of a set of gentle ladies, Dutch and English, who were her constant companions; their piety, their charity, their blameless lives, their industry with the needle, made them utterly different to the ladies of the two last reigns, and set an example which had made soberness fashionable, at least in many homes; for Mary had won England as, many years before, she had won her husband, and was

now nearly as beloved in London as at The Hague—at least among the common people.

One fashion she set was a rage through the country—this was the collecting of strange and monstrous pieces of old china.

Above the yellow brocade chair where she now sat was a shelf laden with vases and figures of extraordinary shapes and violent colours. Mary loved them all; she looked up at them with a little smile, then took up the book from which she had been reading to her ladies, but dropped it on to her lap, and sat with an air of lassitude, gazing into the flames.

"The truth is," she said, "I have a great headache, and have had one this three days past."

"It is the wind," answered Lady Nottingham.

Mary shivered.

"I have taken cold, I think," she remarked. She laughed; she was more than usual gay.

She was expecting the King in a few days, and, for the moment, the troubles and difficulties had a little cleared from his path. For the first time since the war began the last campaign had decided in favour of the allies; the weight of England was beginning to tell in the balance. Mary could not forget that; it coloured her days with pleasure.

"I think the ball will be popular," she continued irrelevantly; "every one seemeth very pleased——"

"What is the date, Madam?" asked Lady Temple.

"The twenty-eighth—about a week from now," answered Mary. "I am to have a new dress!" She laughed again; she seemed, for her, to be very excited. "I shall put it on presently, and you must judge of it."

She leant back in her chair, and was suddenly silent. The short day was darkening; sullen crimson, presaging rain, burnt fitfully in the west, and a gloomy brightness reflected through the windows of the great gallery, and struck changeful colour from the mother-of-pearl figures on the black china screens.

Mary coughed and shivered. She turned to Madame Nienhuys.

"When is your cousin coming to Court?" she asked.

"Not yet, Madam. I had a letter from The Hague yesterday from her mother saying she would send her in the spring."

"Why not sooner?" asked the Queen.

"She saith she is frightened by the reports of the plague in London."

"They say it is worse this year," assented Mary. "And the smallpox."

"And the smallpox, Madam. But it is foolish of my cousin to be so timid."

"Yes," said Mary gravely; "since timidity will save no one. God doth His will, despite our fears."

She opened the work-table beside her and took out a chair-cover she was working with a design of birds and flowers on a black ground. She made a languid attempt to thread the needle, then dropped the sewing as she had the book.

"I will try that gown on," she said, "and then we will make tea in the little antechamber—this is so large."

The ladies rose with a pretty rustle of skirts, folded up their work, and followed Mary through Sir Christopher's noble apartments to her chamber, which was very exactly furnished but cold.

On the canopied bed of blue and yellow damask lay the Queen's new gown, and two sewing-girls sat on low stools and stitched the lace into the sleeves.

At Mary's approach they rose silently.

"How cold it is!" shivered Mary. "Put me down a grumbler, but we had warmer houses at The Hague."

"But the dress is beautiful!" cried Lady Nottingham, and the five ladies gathered about the bed with exclamations of admiration.

It was of white velvet, embroidered with little wreaths of coloured silk flowers opening over a silver petticoat trimmed with flounces of lace. The sewing-maidens eyed it shyly, and blushed at the compliments bestowed.

"I must dance in that," smiled Mary. "Dancing used to be one of my prettiest pleasures, as you may remember, my Lady Temple!"

"Will Your Majesty try it on?" asked Basilea de Marsac.

"Yes," laughed Mary, "the sewing-girls will help me; get you into the other room and make the tea——"

The ladies trooped off, and the two sempstresses timidly helped Mary out of her brown velvet and laced her into the state dress.

A fire was burning, and the Queen stood between it and the bed, facing the long glass mirror above the mantelshelf that was crowded with china grotesques. As they pinned, arranged, and draped the rich silk about her, Mary felt a sudden great fatigue; her limbs were heavy beneath her, and she gave a little sigh of weariness.

The dress was cut very low, and one sleeve was yet unfinished, so her shoulders and left arm were bare save for her shift, and, as she moved for her skirt to be adjusted, that slipped. The Queen noticed this in the mirror, and put up her right hand to draw it up, when suddenly a deep shiver ran through her. She stepped back, clutching the dress together on her shoulder.

"It is too dark to see," she said levelly. "There is a silver lamp in my cabinet—will you fetch that?"

The sewing-girls looked surprised. The light still held, and there were candles in the room; but they left at once, with respectful courtesies.

The instant they had gone the Queen sprang to the door and locked it, then

went back to the bed and leant heavily against the post nearest the fire.

She felt sick and weak; her head was giddy.

”Be quiet—be quiet,” she said aloud, and pressed her clenched knuckles against her leaping heart.

Only for a second did this weakness endure. She returned to the glass and turned her chemise down; there she saw again what had made her send the sewing-girls away—a large purple patch on the white flesh, unmistakable.

For an instant she stood gazing, then sat down in the majestic arm-chair beside the bed. There was another test she knew of—she winced from applying it, yet presently rose and took from a side-table near the tall clock a rat-tailed spoon she used for rose-water.

She put the bowl of this far back into her mouth, and then withdrew it; the silver was covered with bright blood.

Footsteps sounded without. Mary flung the spoon on to the fire and softly unlocked the door.

The sempstresses entered with the silver lamp, dutifully lit and placed it on the mantelshelf.

Mary stood holding her garments tightly together on her breast.

”Have you ever had the smallpox?” she asked gently.

They both answered together.

”Yes, Your Majesty; but not the black smallpox, an it please Your Majesty.”

Mary looked into their fair, undisfigured faces.

”No,” she answered; ”the black smallpox is ever fatal, is it not——”

”They say so, Your Majesty,” said the elder girl, pinning up the lace on the silver underskirt. ”And there is a deal of it in London now, Your Majesty.”

Mary made no reply. They finished with the dress and left her, having laced her into the brown velvet.

The Queen put out the silver lamp and went into the antechamber where the ladies were chattering over the tea Lady Temple was making in a Burmese silver urn.

Mary seated herself near the fire.

”We will go to Kensington House to-morrow,” she said. Then, noticing Lady Temple’s look of surprise, she added, with a slight tremor in her voice, ”I have a fancy to be near the King.”

CHAPTER VIII

FEAR

My Lord Sunderland was climbing from obscurity, disgrace, and infamy to that great position he had once held—climbing very cautiously, working secretly, biding his time, venturing a little here, a little there, helped always by my lady and some few ancient friends.

The King had been obliged to leave him out of the Act of Grace. He was, nevertheless, at this moment waiting for a private audience of His Majesty, who had already visited him in his princely palace at Althorp.

The King had gone in state to Parliament; my lord did not care to yet take his seat in the House on great occasions; he preferred to wait in Whitehall and reflect quietly on his policies.

He believed that the summit of his ambitions was about to be reached; he had staked on William of Orange twenty years ago, and had never lost faith in him. The King was not a man to be ungrateful. Sunderland saw close within his grasp the moment he had worked for steadily, unscrupulously, so long—the moment when William of Orange and he should rule England together.

From his seclusion at Althorp he had watched the King's stormy reign, and known that if he had been at William's right hand half the troubles would have been averted or smoothed over.

He was even scheming to make the Court popular; the attitude of the people towards his hero considerably annoyed him.

It was undeniable that the irreproachable example of the Court awoke in the English more ridicule than respect or admiration; they regarded with a sneer the sincere efforts of the gentle young Queen to elevate and dignify her position, to improve the tone of a corrupt society. The industrious simplicity of the King, his dislike of blasphemy, evil-speaking, and frivolous amusements, his private tolerance, justice, and modesty were as so many causes of offence to a people regretting former princes so much more suited to their temper. They missed the pageant that had continually entertained them at Whitehall, the money that had been squandered by the Court in a manner so pleasing to the national extravagance, the continual spectacle of the King in the obvious exercise of gracious royalty, even the gay ladies whose histories had diverted a generation. This humour provoked cynical smiles from William and distressed comment from Mary. Sunderland resolved to alter it; he saw the truth; he knew that nothing but genius in the man every one combined to disparage could have kept the nation together, and nothing but the greatest courage and strength on the part of the woman they affected to dismiss as a cipher could have maintained a government during the

Irish war.

Sunderland largely blamed the ministers. Halifax had failed, Caermarthen (now Leeds) was failing, the others had never been really trusted by the King, who relied mainly on secret advisers, such as Carstairs, Temple, his Dutch friends, and lately Sunderland himself.

My lord knew that he could do better than any of these; he had the great advantage of understanding the King; he even believed that he could make him again as beloved in England as he had been in '88.

William was no boor, but of noble blood thrice refined; his passionate nature and the constant control he had put it under made him break out fiercely sometimes against the foolish and the vexatious; he never flattered, and he took no trouble to please women. Natural modesty and the languor of ill-health made him refuse to concede to the national love of display; but he was beloved abroad, and Sunderland believed he could be beloved in England. My lord resolved to persuade him to go to Newmarket this year; he flattered himself that he had a considerable influence over William.

He became impatient for the King to return; he went to the window and looked at the surging crowd beyond the courtyard waiting for a sight of the Royal coach. It was not likely to be greeted very warmly, for the King was, a second time, going to veto the Triennial Bill, a great popular measure which, from the first, he had set his face against.

Sunderland upheld him; to consent to the Bill would be an enormous concession to the people, and my lord had no love for the democracy, but, like William, had a high ideal of the rights of the Crown. He took pleasure now in thinking of the King's firm stand and the disappointment of this crowd when the news of the vetoed Bill was flashed from mouth to mouth.

As he watched, standing within the silver-corded curtains, a party of halberdiers suddenly scattered the people to right and left, a company of soldiers drove up, and then the Royal coach came, unusually fast, swinging on its leathers.

A deep hum rose from the crowd; some broke into cheering, hats were thrown up, and handkerchiefs waved. Sunderland had never seen the King receive such a cordial reception.

He withdrew from the window, surprised, a little puzzled.

The satisfied murmur of the crowd continued.

"Why—is it possible——" cried my lord.

He hastened to seek out the King.

William was in his dressing-room, disrobing. M. Zulestein was with him, and several other nobles.

Gold-embroidered purple, scarlet and ermine, the collar and star of the George lay tossed on one of the gilt walnut chairs; the King, in silk shirt and

white satin breeches, sat by a marquetry dressing-table with a letter in his hand.

Sunderland entered as one sure of his welcome. William had promised him countenance if he would come to Court.

”Your Majesty——” he began.

The King looked at him blankly; his face, between the dark curls, was of a startling whiteness.

”Ah, sir,” said Sunderland, ”do I break in upon Your Majesty?”

”No,” answered William vaguely.

My lord looked round the other nobles; they seemed strangely silent.

”Sir, how went it in Parliament?” he asked, approaching the King.

William made a heavy effort to answer.

”I—well enough—they——” His voice trailed off.

Sunderland stood utterly amazed. Was this man going to fail?

”Sir, the Triennial Bill?” he questioned half fearfully.

The King rose; he seemed utterly unnerved; he whom my lord had ever considered beyond the touch of weakness.

”I passed it,” he said faintly.

The colour flashed into Sunderland’s face.

”You did!” he cried. ”You made that great concession. By God, if any but Your Majesty had made that statement I should have disbelieved them——”

The King did not seem to hear him; he called distractedly for his coat, and walked up and down the splendid little chamber with his head bent.

Sunderland, sick at heart, drew M. de Zulestein aside.

”What is the matter with the King?” he whispered. ”I should not have known him——”

”He hath been all day like a man in a confusion,” answered the Master of the Robes.

”And to give way,” muttered Sunderland. ”To concede like any weakling!”

William mechanically took from one of the lords his coat, sword, and hat, and stood still a moment before the chair on which his orders glittered on his robes, like frozen coloured water gleaming in the winter sunlight.

”Is the coach ready?” he asked abruptly.

”Your Majesty,” reminded M. de Zulestein, ”is to dine in public here to-day——”

”No,” said the King, ”I will go at once to Kensington House—hasten the coach——”

”But there are a number of people already gathered—it will cause grievous offence——”

The King stared at him with wild dark eyes.

”My God, I will not stay an instant.”

M. de Zulestein bowed.

At this moment Lord Portland entered; they saw him with profound relief, believing that, if any could, he would fathom and combat the King's humour.

At sight of him William flushed with animation. Portland crossed to him at once; he seemed himself troubled in his manner.

The King caught his hand and pressed it inside his open satin waistcoat, over his heart.

"Do you feel that?" he asked. "Have you ever known it beat so?—that is fear, William, fear——"

He spoke in his own language, and with an extraordinary energy and passion.

"The letter," asked Portland tenderly, "that was handed you as we started——"

"From Sir Thomas Millington," said the King; he put it into his friend's hands and sank on to the chair beside the dressing-table; he seemed utterly unconscious of the watchful eyes upon him, of the presence, indeed, of any but Portland.

That lord read the letter of Sir Thomas (he was the King's physician) with, it seemed, some relief.

"Why, he merely saith the Queen is not well."

William answered hoarsely—

"Lady Temple came to Whitehall this morning when you were abroad ... you know *she* hath never had the smallpox." His voice broke; he stared out of the window at the winter sky.

"God in Heaven!" exclaimed Portland. "You do not think of *that*?"

"Lady Temple," muttered the King, "said—*she* had sent from Kensington—every one, even to the maid-servants—who—had not had the smallpox——"

"That is but her own sweet kindness," cried Portland—"she cannot know——"

"I am afraid, afraid," answered the King. "My father, my mother, my uncle ... all dead of that..."

He sprang up and turned to the door. Sunderland was in his way, and stayed him gently.

"Sir—I entreat you do not disappoint the people—stay in Whitehall to dine——"

William looked at him fiercely.

"Do you not hear that the Queen is sick?"

Sunderland's face was cold; he was disappointed in the King.

"What of this Bill for the Calling of Parliaments?" he said. "I would like to

hear some good reason for that concession on the part of Your Majesty."

William made no answer; he put out his hand and motioned my lord out of his way. Sunderland stepped aside and the King left the room. They heard his high heels going quickly down the corridors.

Portland turned to M. de Zulestein.

"Why, he hath known two days that the Queen was not well."

"It was Lady Temple," answered the Master of the Robes. "She told him Her Majesty was worse than she would admit."

"But the doctors——"

"You know the King hath never had any trust in doctors—and certainly it giveth an ill-colour that she hath sent away all that are like to be infected."

"Meanwhile the Bill is passed," said Sunderland. "And I have misreckoned on the King."

He took his leave haughtily of the Dutch nobles, and they went after the King. An excited and disturbed crowd filled the galleries and the banqueting hall where the dishes were already on the table and the lords ready to serve.

The King had already left Whitehall in the Duke of Leeds' coach, with no other company but that nobleman.

So completely deceived were the spectators who lined the way from the Palace to the post office in Charing Cross to see the great people drive away from Parliament that they, recognizing the arms and liveries of Leeds (now unpopular by reason of the East India scandals), hooted lustily, with no conception that the King was beside my lord.

Nor did either King or minister care one whit whether the crowd hooted or cheered. Leeds was on the verge of ruin, and knew it, yet thought little about that; he had a peculiar regard for the Queen, a peculiar loyalty towards the King; his thoughts, like his master's, were with that lady whose life meant so much to England.

In half an hour they were at Kensington House; in a few minutes more the King, the Duke's mantle over his white satins and the garter still round his knee, was by Mary's side in the long Queen's gallery.

She was seated close to the fire with Basilea de Marsac and Madame de Nienhuys—very languidly seated, with her hands in her lap and a blue scarf about her shoulders.

Her extravagant joy at the King's coming was piteous to see.

"So soon!" she cried, and her whole face changed. "I thought it could not be till this evening ... but were they not expecting you to dine at Whitehall?"

"No matter for that," he answered breathlessly. "You—you are no worse?"

"Oh, I am well again," smiled Mary; "but you will make yourself unpopular if you disappoint the people—yet I am glad you came—I thought I must see you—

that is why I came from Hampton yesterday, forgive me—but even the sound of the Tower guns as you went to Parliament was company——"

She paused, and seemed rather exhausted by the effort of speaking. William noticed with unutterable anxiety that the hand he held was burning hot and that she shivered continuously, yet she was so joyous, smiling, and lovely he could not trust his own fears.

The two ladies had withdrawn to the other end of the gallery. The King took the stool beside Mary.

"Did you pass the Parliament Bill?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, never taking his eyes from her face and speaking as if it was a matter of no moment.

"Ah, why?" she asked, startled.

"I did not care; what doth it matter? Do not talk of business, Marie."

"No," she said softly; "let us forget great affairs for once. I am so weary, dear."

"But you are better?" He could scarcely control his voice.

She smiled brightly.

"Oh yes; I was out driving this morning, and afterwards talking to Dr. Burnet, and you know that taketh some energy—I think to have my ball just the same next Saturday. I have remedied myself and not troubled the doctors."

He wished to ask her why she had given the orders about her household that had so shaken him, but could not bring the words to his lips.

Mary coughed a little, and sat up.

"I wanted to ask you something," she said. "I am always begging—am I not?"

He pressed the hand he held between his so fiercely that his heavy rings hurt her, but she continued smiling.

"About Greenwich Palace," she added rather faintly. "I want it for a hospital——"

"I know, I know," he answered remorsefully. "You have spoken of it before. It hath always been the cursed money, but you shall have it if I have to pawn my furniture."

"There are so many old seamen about," murmured Mary—"poor and wounded—and many of them were at La Hogue and helped save us all. I used to see them when I took my airing in Hyde Park, begging—one could not forbear tears. And the hospitals are full. But Greenwich——"

"It shall be," said William. "Give that no more thought. Wren shall draw plans. It shall be as you wish, only get well again, and that shall be my thankoffering."

Looking and smiling at him she sat silent while the firelight flooded her

figure with gorgeous light; in that moment's stillness both of them thought of love as a terrible thing.

Mary suddenly closed her eyes.

"Your mother," she said softly, "do you remember her?"

He answered under his breath—

"Yes. Your name, my dear, your family, should I not remember her?"

"When she died she was no older than I am—I often think how strangely near her grave is. I think that Chapel in Westminster a sad spot. But if we live with our thoughts on Death how can we be afraid? God would not let one be afraid."

"Why do you speak of death?" asked the King, in a trembling voice. "You frighten me——"

"Ah no," whispered Mary. "Death is not fearful. I have been idle to-day, and thought of many strange things. I recalled a portrait of your mother I found in a desk of yours when I first came to Holland—a limning in little with white violets on the back, and these words, 'J'aime un seul.' That was a pretty thought of hers."

She moved her head restlessly on the red cushions and lifted her heavy lids.

"I would we were at The Hague again," she said wistfully.

"You shall go," he replied impetuously. "When the spring cometh we will go together to The Hague, and be free of all of it——"

"There is the war."

"Let Waldeck take the command this campaign—I will stay with you. We have had so little time together all these years."

Mary gazed tenderly into his ardent face.

"The spring seemeth so far off. Hold my hand. I feel as if the world might pass from beneath us if we could sit thus and I not notice. You will be with me this Christmas-tide?"

"I shall not leave you," he said hoarsely. "I will nurse you till you are well again. But you are not ill?" he added piteously.

"No—tired a little." She sat up and put her hands on his shoulders. "You do not regret the day they married you to your poor little cousin?" The soft brown eyes were full of yearning. "She was such a foolish child, so ignorant——"

He could not speak, but made a movement of his hands to hers as if to stop her.

"Let me speak," said Mary sweetly. "I have thought so much about it lately. We learnt everything so late—our mistakes last of all, I think, and I have made many mistakes. Perhaps another woman would have helped you more. But I have done my best—I wanted to say that—I have always done my best."

He managed to answer, but almost incoherently.

”You shame me—utterly shame me—you—know what you have been to me——”

Mary dropped her hands; the tears gathered in her eyes.

”And I am childless,” she faltered.

He sprang up as if he wrenched himself free from torture.

”Do not leave me,” entreated Mary feebly. ”I think I am not very well, after all, and you promised to stay—forgive me—but indeed I think of it and your great kindness.”

He turned about and leant over her chair. Mary clung to him with hot hands.

”No one could have loved you more,” she said, in great agitation—”too much, for my own peace——”

Her fever-flushed face drooped against the lace on his bosom; he put his arm round her, and she gave a great sigh; the tears were on her lashes and running slowly down her face; he kissed her loose hair and the hand on his shoulder.

”God,” he said, in an unsteady whisper, answering his own desperate fears, ”could not be so cruel.”

CHAPTER IX
CHRISTMAS EVE

Kensington House was hushed and dark; in only one room did a light burn, and that was where the Queen of England sat alone in her cabinet with the door locked and two tapers burning on her desk.

It was long past midnight on Christmas Eve, and she supposed in bed; the stillness was intense; the ticking of the little brass clock sounded loud and steady—a solitary noise.

Mary sat at the desk with her papers spread before her; she had burnt many of them in the candle-flame, and a little pile of ashes lay on the cold hearth.

It was four days since she had first sickened, and the doctors said this and that, disagreeing with each other, and constantly changing their opinion; but Mary had never been deceived; she had cheated herself, she had cheated the King, into a belief that she was lately better, but from the moment in her bedchamber at Hampton Court when the thought of her danger had first flashed on her, she had had an absolute premonition that this was the end. All her life had been

coloured by the sense she would not live past youth. The first shock over, she did not grieve for herself, but terribly, more terribly than she had conceived she could, for the King.

At first a kind of wild joy had possessed her that she would go first; but the agony of leaving him alone was almost as awful as the agony of being left.

Because she could not endure to face his anguish she had so far concealed from him both her certainty of her own approaching end and her own belief as to her malady. Dr. Radcliffe alone among the physicians had said smallpox, and been laughed at for his opinion, but the Queen knew that he was right. "Malignant black smallpox," he had said, and she knew he was right in that also.

Few recovered from this plague; few lived beyond the week.

Alone in the little cabinet, consecrated by so many prayers, meditations, and tears, the young Queen faced her fate.

"I am going to die," she said to herself. "I am going to die in a few days."

She sat back in her chair and caught her breath. The stillness seemed to ache in her ears. So little done, so much unfinished, so many storms, troubles, attempts, poor desperate endeavours, and now—the end.

She recalled that when the King had been last on the Continent she had been ill of a sore throat, and been so melancholy on account of the dismal state of public affairs, the ingratitude and malice of the people, that she had wished to die, but checked that thought, believing that she could still be of service to her husband. And now it was no wish or idle fancy, but the very thing itself.

And she must leave him.

Her deep piety made her think the agony she endured at that thought a punishment for having so deeply loved a human creature. She tried to fix her mind on God, but earthly affection was stronger. The image of heaven became dim beside the image of him to whom her whole heart had been given; the very tenderness that had been provoked in him by her illness made it harder.

At last she rose and went over to a little gilt escritoire in the corner; there were locked away all the letters she had ever had from the King, some from her father, a Prayer Book of her mother's before her conversion, some of her own meditations and prayers, her diary, and various little trifles with poignant associations.

With the keys in her hand she hesitated, but courage failed her to open any of the drawers; she returned to the large bureau and took up a sheet of paper.

She felt ill and cold; her limbs were heavy, her eyes ached, and her head was full of pain. She made a strong effort of will to take up the quill and write; at first the pen shook so there were mere ink-marks on the paper.

What she wrote were a few last requests to the King: that her jewels and clothes might be given to her sister Anne, that her servants might be looked after,

that he would remember his promise with regard to the hospital at Greenwich, and that if Leeds was disgraced the King would deal mildly with him—"for he hath ever been a good servant to us."

She did not trust herself to add words of affection, but wrote beneath, "The Lord have thee in His keeping," folded it up with the ink scarce dry, and rose to unlock the top drawer of the escritoire and place the paper within.

That done she relocked it and placed the key in her bosom.

All her other papers and letters she had destroyed; her private affairs were in order; she had not a debt nor an obligation in the world. There was nothing more to do.

She put her hands before her eyes and endeavoured to settle her thoughts, to dismiss earthly matters and think only of God, but she could not put the King out of her heart. Her thoughts ran past her own death, and saw him lonely amidst his difficulties, without her aid to smooth over little frictions, without her company in his infrequent leisure, without her sympathy in his disappointments; in a thousand little ways he scarcely knew of she had been able to help him, and now there would be no one—no one to watch and notice and understand as she had done; she could not trust even Portland to do what she had done.

"God forgive me for this weakness," she murmured, in great distress. "God strengthen and make it easy for us both."

She rose and went to the window; she could see the black sky pierced here and there by a few stars as the clouds parted—nothing else.

On an instant the deep silence was rent by a clamour of sweet sound; the sharp strong pealing of church bells rang out over the sleeping city.

Mary knew that it was the village church of Kensington practising for Christmas; she sank into the window-seat and fixed her eyes on those few distant pale cold stars.

She could not steady her thoughts. Old memories, pictures of dead days, arose and disturbed her. She saw the sunlight on the red front of the house at Twickenham and the little roses growing over the brick, herself as a child playing in the garden, and the figure of her father standing by the sundial looking at her, as he had stood once on one of his rare visits—very handsome and tall and grave with long tasselled gloves in his hand, she saw the hayfields beyond St. James's and the summer-tanned labourers working there and a little girl in a blue gown asleep on a gathered sheaf and Lady Villiers pointing out the last swallow and how low it flew—so low that the light of the setting sun was over its back and it was like a thing of gold above the rough stubble—she saw pictures of The Hague—that beautiful town, and her own dear house, and the wood...

She remembered her presentiment, before William left for England, that they were looking at the wood together for the last time.

All over now, mere memory, and memory itself soon to end; she would never see the flowers again either in England or Holland; she had looked her last on blue sky and summer sun; she would never more go down to Chester to welcome the King home from the war; she would never again cut the sweet briar roses to place in the blue bowls at Hampton Court.

It frightened her that she thought so of these earthly things, that she could not detach her mind from the world. She endeavoured to fix her attention on the bells, and they seemed to shake into the words of an ancient hymn she had known as a child—

> ”O Lord, let Thou my spirit rise
> From out this Press of turning Strife.
> Let me look into Thy awful eyes
> And draw from Thee Immortal Life.”

The bells seemed to change into one of the endless little Dutch carillons that she heard so often in her dreams; she put her hands before her face—

> ”Take, dear Lord, the best of me,
> And let it, as an Essence pressed
> Like unto Like, win Immortality
> Absorbed in Thy unchanging rest.”

The bells paused and shuddered as if a rude hand had checked them; the melody hesitated, then changed rhythm; a single bell struck out from the rest in clear ringing, then stopped.

For a little space the air was full of echoes, then a mournful stillness fell. The Queen remained in the window-seat with her hands before her eyes.

When she raised her head one of the candles had guttered out and the other was near its end.

She had lost the sense of time, almost of place; it would have given her no surprise to find she was sitting in the garden at The Hague or going down the waterways of Holland in her barge; she did not notice the darkness so ill-dispersed by that one flame burning tall, ragged, and blue in the great silver stick; she began to say over her prayers in a kind of exaltation; she went on her knees and pressed her face against the smooth wood of the window-frame; she was murmuring to herself under her breath as if she tried to lull her own soul to sleep; she got up at last, not knowing what she did, and unlatched the window.

She looked out on a ghastly dawn, pallid above the leafless trees, against which a few flakes of snow fell heavily. The Queen stared at this picture. The cold wind entered the chamber and a snowflake lightly drifted in and changed to a crystal drop on the window-seat.

She latched the window again and turned into the room; the last candle had been out hours; the wax was hard round the frozen wick; a whole night had passed with the drawing of a breath, and this was Christmas morning.

Above the chimney-piece was a mirror in a gold and ebony frame; the Queen stepped up to it and looked at herself; she beheld a woman without colour; her gown was black and her face and throat indistinguishable from her crumpled lace collar; her hair was dark and without a glint in the dead light; the pearls in her ears were ghostly pale; she thought her features were very changed, being hollowed and sunk.

"They cover the faces of the dead," she thought curiously; "they will soon cover mine." She put her hand delicately under her chin. "Poor face, that will never laugh or blush—or weep again!"

CHAPTER X
THE QUEEN

Dr. Burnet was returning from his diocese of Sarum to Kensington Palace, where he had been called by the grave reports of the Queen's sickness.

On Christmas Day she had been something better, but towards the evening notably worse; on Wednesday prayers were offered in all the churches, and the new primate, Dr. Tenison, was summoned to join the other prelates in attendance at Kensington.

The Bishop of Sarum was joined in London by M. Zulestein, for whom he had a peculiar friendship, and who came to urge haste.

The Master of the Robes hoped that the Bishop's presence might have some effect upon the astonishing and immoderate agitation of the King; he confessed he had been glad to escape from the atmosphere of anxiety and grief at Kensington.

Soldier and priest made a melancholy journey in M. Zulestein's coach. The Capital was very silent and awed. There could be no doubt now that the Queen was beloved.

”If she goes,” said M. Zulestein bluntly, ”he can never hold the throne. His very title to it would be questioned. Without her where are we all?”

Dr. Burnet answered unsteadily; he was deeply attached to Mary.

”Do not speak like that, sir. She must live—even if it be smallpox, is she not young and strong? Did not the King recover?”

”He had it but slightly,” answered M. Zulestein. ”He was back at the army in twenty days. They say it was his own resolution not to die and the services of M. Portland that saved him, but I do not think this lady hath any such will to live.”

”God bless us,” cried the Bishop, ”who would have thought a man of the King’s feeble constitution would have survived the Queen!” He shook his head sorrowfully. ”She was our principal hope, our support—a prince of an extraordinary goodness.”

”If she dieth she hath the better part,” answered the Dutchman. ”I know not how the King will well bear it—he hath hardly slept since her illness—for fear of his cough disturbing her he will not lie in her chamber, but hath his camp-bed in the anteroom—yet he is never on it—he hath himself nursed her—day and night with such devotion and care as moveth the heart.” He paused, and added, with great emotion, ”Had you seen him as I have, in all manner of dangers and fatigues and troubles, always master of himself, and of such an heroical courage that he inflamed those about him, you would find it, sir, terrible to see him as he is now.”

”When I last saw him he was struck beyond expression,” answered Dr. Burnet. ”But I never thought his temper would bear an open display of emotion.”

”You know him as well as any Englishman—yet you do not know him,” said M. Zulestein.

The pompous self-love of the Bishop was rather hit at this, but he let it pass (as he would not have done at any other time), and neither spoke again before they reached Kensington House.

They found the household in much disorder—the courtyard filled with carriages, the corridors with messengers waiting for the news. M. Zulestein told his companion that the Princess Anne (in open disgrace on account of her championship of my Lord Marlborough, who had been discovered in flagrant treachery) had sent a humble loving message, and that the King had replied warmly, but requested her not to come till there was a turn for the better.

Dr. Burnet thought this answer of the King’s looked as if the doctors held out hope; he shouldered his way through the crowd to the Queen’s private apartments, and rather breathless and without ceremony he and M. Zulestein put aside the ushers and entered the first antechamber of Mary’s apartments.

It was empty save for a couple of curious, frightened servants; but the door into the next room was open, and the two new-comers beheld an extraordinary

scene.

A little group with their faces hidden stood before the window; near them at the table was a florid, coarse-featured man, plainly dressed, and cast down before him a gentleman in a violet coat—on his knees with his hands raised in a gesture of abandoned entreaty.

The back of this gentleman was towards Dr. Burnet.

"Dear God!" he muttered, seizing M. Zulestein's arm, "is it—the King?"

M. Zulestein, utterly pale, made a gesture of assent, and hastened forward. The man before whom the King knelt stepped back in a kind of desperation, and cried—

"If Your Majesty were to offer me your three kingdoms I could give you no other answer!"

At this the King fell forward on his face, and he was lying so, prone, when the Bishop and M. Zulestein entered.

Dr. Radcliffe wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and looked round half-defiantly.

"Gentlemen," he said hoarsely, "I take you to witness I have done my duty. His Majesty asked the truth. It is smallpox, and Her Majesty is sinking rapidly. I was not called in until it was too late."

Portland had come from the window, and was raising the King.

"You have some courage, sir," he said grimly.

Dr. Radcliffe retorted in self-defence—

"I did not undertake this for pleasure, your lordship; there was no one else would dare tell His Majesty."

Portland got the King to his feet; the others stood awkward and still; William looked round and saw Dr. Burnet.

"Did you hear?" he asked, under his breath—"did you hear?"

He sank into the chair by the table. The Bishop approached with some faltering words of comfort, but the King cut him short.

"They say there is no hope of the Queen!" he broke out. "No hope! I was the most happy creature upon earth, and now shall be the most miserable! There was no fault in her, not one—you know her as well as any, but you could not know her as I did—there was a worth in her none could know but I!"

With that he burst into a passion of tears, and hid his face on the table in an abandonment of agony which amazed those about him, who knew neither what to say nor do in face of this overthrow of the Master whom they had always regarded as one who would preserve a decent control in the face of any sorrow, since he was a soldier and a statesman, and had kept his countenance in many a bitter crisis, and always shown a singular pride in controlling his passions—so much so, as to be stately and cold even to those he loved; yet here he wept before

the very staring servants and gave no heed. Lord Portland thought there was something womanish and unworthy in this desperate grief; he went up to the King and spoke with a kind of heat.

"Will you give way thus? Where is your trust in God?"

He was speaking not to the King of England, but to William of Nassau, at whose side he had faced so many years of danger, his companion in arms, his truest friend.

"She will go to everlasting peace," he said, with energy. "You, who have faced so much, can face the loss of her—for her sake, for her eternal good."

If the King heard these words they did not touch him; he raised his head a little, and broke into incoherent lamentation in a misery of tears.

Portland spoke to Dr. Radcliffe.

"How long," he asked, "will it be?"

"She may," answered the doctor, in a lowered voice, "live another day, my lord, no more; the smallpox are now so sunk there is no hope of raising them."

"Should she not be warned of her danger?"

"That is as the King wishes."

"The King!" echoed Portland, in a tone of despair. He turned again to his master. "Sire," he said gently, "will you have the Queen told?"

William looked up; the tears were streaming down his face for any one to see; he continually shuddered violently, and spoke so hoarsely Portland could with difficulty catch the words.

"I'll not believe it yet—I cannot—these doctors—must save her——"

"Dr. Tenison," answered Portland, "is with her now—it were best that he should tell her of her condition——"

The King broke out into ejaculations of anguish.

"There was none like her in all the world—none! No one could know her great goodness. O God, my God, this is more than I can bear!"

Portland turned his eyes away, broken himself.

"I am amazed," whispered Dr. Burnet; "for surely I never thought him capable of such emotion."

Dr. Radcliffe touched Portland on the arm.

"Look to His Majesty," he said. "I think this will prove beyond his endurance—I will to the Queen."

He took his leave softly. The King lifted his head and looked after him.

"He said there was no hope!" he cried. "No hope!"

"God is your hope," answered Portland strongly.

"Talk not of God, for this is death and damnation to me—if she leaves me nothing matters on earth or in heaven—what have I done—what have I done that the Devil is let loose on me?" He cast his eyes round wildly, and staggered to his

feet. ”She was all I had—all—I should have died first—I might have died happy—I have not lived so wickedly I should be punished thus—but they mistake, these doctors—she cannot die—no, it is not possible.”

They were all silent. The scene was painful almost past bearing. The King’s agonies went beyond all bounds. None of them, though they were all men who had known him most of his life, had believed that his temper was capable of such passion. Dr. Burnet’s fluent self-assurance was checked—he stood dumb and staring; the Dutch nobles gazed in horror and dismay at this spectacle of a proud man’s utter overthrow. Portland remained beside him, and the King supported himself by holding heavily on to his arm.

”Doctors mistake, do they not?” he cried, between the long shudders that shook him. ”How often have they not said—I should die—but I lived.”

”Alas,” answered Portland unsteadily, ”I would not have you deceive yourself—Radcliffe was very certain. But you will command yourself——”

”I—I have no strength,” gasped the King; ”my soul is broken within me. O God!” he sobbed, ”save her or let me go!”

He turned about and threw out his hand like a blind man feeling his way, then fell back into Portland’s arms.

”Fainted,” said my lord laconically. With the help of M. Zulestein he laid him on the stiff couch between the windows. One of the servants hurried for a doctor, and in the moment’s confusion my Lord Leeds entered unnoticed.

Portland, as he moved from the King’s couch, was the first to see him.

”Ah, my lord,” he said sorrowfully, ”what is to become of us all?”

”The King,” murmured Portland, much moved, ”is incapable of anything—do you take the direction of affairs.”

”Nay, you, my lord,” answered Leeds. ”You are His Majesty’s nearer friend.”

”And your Grace is English—it will be more politic should you take this office—what of the Queen?”

”I have just come from her antechamber—even the pages and serving-maids are in tears—this is a heavy business.” He himself seemed like a man utterly overcome. ”She is certainly sinking—she is in private discourse now with the Archbishop.”

”Doth she know?”

Leeds shook his head.

”Dr. Tenison waiteth the King’s commands to tell her—but I think she hath an inner knowledge.”

M. Auverqueverque came from the group by the window and whispered Portland that the King was conscious.

At this Leeds, ever warm-hearted and impulsive, went on his knees beside the couch and pressed the King’s cold hand affectionately to his lips.

William sat up with his head drooping; his back was to the light, and his thick curls almost concealed his face; he held his handkerchief to his lips and shivered continually.

"The Queen," said Leeds, very low, "hath asked for Your Majesty."

The King murmured something incoherent.

"And the Archbishop," continued Leeds, with a grave gentleness, "thinketh she should be told of her danger."

"I would not have her deceived—in so important a matter," whispered the King—"tell him so." He leant forward and took Leeds by the shoulders. "Is it not an awful thing that she should die—she—to die—you ever loved her—God bless you for that, my lord—she had a sad life"—his voice became very indistinct—"she will not be sorry—but as for me——"

His hands loosened on the Duke's shoulders, and with a little moan he fell into another fainting fit, so long and deathlike that they feared for his reason or his life; it seemed, indeed, as if he would scarcely survive her whose danger caused his despair.

CHAPTER XI
THE BITTER PARTING

The Queen's bed stood out into the room, facing the long windows which looked on to the winter twilight; it was hung with four curtains of gold and blue damask sewn with many-coloured wreaths of flowers that Mary and her maids had worked when seated under the alley of wych-elm at Hampton Court.

The coverlet was of crimson satin embroidered with great roses of England and fringed with bullion. The Queen lay so still that the heavy folds were scarcely disturbed about her limbs. The curtains round the head of the bed had been drawn forward, and the pillows and the face of the Queen were in shadow.

She wore a lace cap with long lappets fastened beneath her chin and a little jacket of blue silk over her muslin nightgown. She was not disfigured, it being the most deadly symptom of her disease that there was no sign of it beyond the deep purple marks that had told Dr. Radcliffe—black smallpox—from the first, and the constant internal bleeding of her throat that had so exhausted her; that had stopped now, and she lay quite free from pain quiet for several hours; not sleeping; sleep, she said, gave her no ease.

To the right of the bed the King knelt with his face hidden in the quilt. There were several prelates and doctors in the room, and by the head of the bed Lady Temple, Madame Nienhuys, Basilea de Marsac, and Lady Portland, the Earl's second wife and Lady Temple's daughter.

At a whispered word from Dr. Radcliffe, Tenison, the new Archbishop of Canterbury, successor to the saintly Tillotson, so beloved by the King and Queen, approached the bed.

As his footfall broke the tense silence Mary lifted her languid eyes; he came round to her left, and stood, in a sorrowful attitude, looking down on her.

"Be seated, my lord," she faltered.

But out of respect to her and the presence of the King he remained standing.

Mary made a feeble motion with her right hand, which lay outside the coverlet, and sweetly stammered her repeated commands that he should sit.

Dr. Tenison obeyed, and with a heavy heart. Her gentle patience made his duty the harder. Dr. Radcliffe had just told him that since she now seemed tranquil and in full consciousness he might tell her of her approaching end.

The Bishop, a good heavy man, set about his task with pain and tenderness.

"Your Majesty will forgive me plain speaking, but I am entrusted by the King——"

She lay with her face towards him, and her brown eyes narrowed. He hesitated, fearing to greatly agitate her, and sought for a form of words in which to cast his speech.

"I am greatly grieved to see that Your Majesty is no better," he said. "Your consolation will come from heaven, not earth."

She instantly perceived his drift.

"You are come to tell me that I am dying?" she asked faintly.

He was startled that she had so instantly understood, and could not, for the moment, speak.

"I thank my God," continued the Queen, "that I have had this in my thoughts from the first. And there is nothing to be done. Search for a little escritoire in my cabinet and give it to the King. That is the end of earthly matters."

She closed her eyes and gave a little sigh.

"Will it please Your Majesty receive the Sacrament?" asked the Archbishop.

"Yes," she said at once. "Yes."

He left her, and she turned her head languidly and gazed before her at the window.

Lady Temple came forward lovingly, and looked down at her with sorrowful eyes.

"Before you light the candles," whispered Mary, "will you draw the curtains a little that I may see the sky?"

Lady Portland crossed the floor delicately and pulled back the heavy gold thread and scarlet damask from the December twilight.

A pale glow of colourless light fell across the glittering bed, the wan face of the Queen, and the motionless kneeling figure of her husband.

She could see loose grey clouds, an indistinct trail of yellow fire low behind the leafless trees which tossed slowly in a feeble wind.

She gave another little sigh and again closed her eyes. Lady Portland, weeping, drew the curtains. Basilea de Marsac and Madame de Nienhuys lit the candles on the mantelshelf, on the table between the windows, and the crystal lamp ornamented with the rose, the shamrock, and thistle in silver that hung from the centre of the ceiling.

The Queen lay still all this while; she did not speak till Dr. Tenison approached her bed again, and all the prelates in the chamber went on their knees.

"I doubt if I can swallow the bread," she murmured anxiously.

The bishops in the room took the Sacrament with her; they were all heavy with grief, and the Primate faltered in his ministrations, but she was utterly calm; she followed the holy office clearly with no hesitation. Despite her fears, she swallowed the bread without difficulty, and thanked Dr. Tenison sweetly when he had done, and lay for awhile, praying it seemed. She was so resigned that it seemed she rather desired to die than live.

Presently she whispered, "I would speak to the King."

They all withdrew from the bed to the far end of the room and the antechamber. Mary put out a trembling hand and touched the bent dark head that rested on her quilt.

"Ah, love!" she said.

He raised his face, moving for the first time since she had fallen asleep, two hours ago.

"They have told me," whispered Mary, "that I must say farewell—I always knew—forgive me that I had not the courage to tell you." She smiled. "I am so tired, and I have so much to say."

With her right hand she drew a small gold key from the bosom of her gown and gave it him.

"The little escritoire," she explained. "I asked him to give it you—only a few trifles—but you will understand."

He took it with a shudder, her left hand he held between his tightly; he did not speak; his face was as white, as hallowed, as shadowed by death, it seemed, as hers.

"I have not done much," she said; "but I have had such a little time, and it was difficult—indeed difficult. God will know I did my poor best. And I never failed in love, and I tried to do His will, but I have done nothing, and I meant to

do so much——”

The King forced his voice.

”You have been a creature we were none of us fit to touch,” he muttered. ”You—you—oh, Marie!”

He hid his face upon her hand, and she felt his hot tears on her fingers.

”Do not grieve,” she whispered. ”There is still so much for you to do——”

”No more,” he answered passionately; ”that is over now—I shall never do anything again—never——”

Mary half raised herself on the pillows; a feverish colour came into her cheeks.

”You are rebelling against God,” she said, between agitated breaths. ”You must go on—your work is not finished; but the prospects are so splendid——”

”What is that to me?” he answered, in bitter despair. ”I am a poor weak creature—I can do nothing—it was always you, your hope, your faith—I am no better than a thing of nought; in taking you God mocks me——”

”No—no,” cried Mary, with a desperate strength. ”You are going on—you will conquer—do not make it hard for me to die——”

She sank on to her pillows, coughing a little.

”I have prayed God not to let you despair—I have asked Him to comfort you——”

”There is no more comfort for me,” he answered. ”I want you—nothing but you on earth or in heaven——”

Mary turned her face towards him; the dark auburn hair, beneath the fine veiling of lace, hung over the edge of the tumbled pillow and touched his hand.

”Oh, my husband,” she said faintly; ”I have loved you with a passion that cannot end with death. You cannot—ever be alone again—I shall be there——”

Her voice sank and died; she made an effort to lean towards him. He caught her to his bosom and kissed her cold forehead with lips as cold.

”Go on,” she stammered, ”do not give up—the goal is nearly won——”

She became slack in his arms; he laid her back on the pillow, and rose.

She was smiling up at him, but there was an awful change in her face.

He put his hand before his eyes, and fell down beside her bed, motionless, along the shining floor.

Mary clasped her hands on her bosom, and her head drooped to one side; she continually coughed, and her lids closed heavily.

Lady Temple had run forward as the King fell; Portland and Leeds raised and carried him, easily enough, into the antechamber.

Dr. Radcliffe gave the Queen a cordial; she thanked him, and seemed a little revived.

”Let me sit up,” she whispered. Her ladies raised her against the piled-up

cushions. ”The King”—she added—”the King?—my eyes are weak—I thought—he left me——”

”Dear Lady,” answered Dorothy Temple, commanding her own tears, ”he is in the next chamber——”

She knew while she spoke that he had fallen into a succession of fits so terrible that not one doctor there thought he could live.

”Perhaps,” gasped Mary, ”it were better if we—were spared—a final farewell—I could not well bear it——”

She leant against Lady Temple’s shoulder, and her lips moved in prayer. Her face was very troubled, and she continually sighed.

”Madam, are you at peace?” asked Lady Temple.

”I am not sorry to go to God,” she answered; ”but I am weak about the King—I would I might have been spared a little longer with him.”

Presently she fell asleep, peacefully it seemed, and still with prayers on her lips.

Lady Temple crept from the bed where Lady Portland pulled the curtains to shield the Queen from the light, and asked Dr. Radcliffe how long it might be now?

He shook his head sadly.

”A few hours, my lady.”

Dorothy Temple burst out into subdued grief.

”We have the greatest loss in this lady! I have known her since she was a child, and she had never a fault—this is a bitter thing for all of us, and for England.”

The doctor answered grimly—

”A more bitter thing even than you imagine, my lady. I do not think the King will live.”

She looked at him in utter terror, and at that moment Portland came out of the antechamber.

”Will you go to His Majesty, doctor?” he said, in a shaking voice. ”Millington doth not know what to do.”

Radcliffe left them, and Lady Temple desperately seized hold of Portland’s arm.

”Oh, William,” she whispered; ”how is the King?”

”Sorely stricken,” he answered. ”Is this to be the end?—that he should die for a woman!”

Lady Portland came softly from the bed to her mother and her husband.

”Doth it not seem cruel that the Queen should die?” she murmured. ”They say there is no hope——”

”The Queen!” echoed Portland. ”I think of the King——”

”Can you not,” urged his wife anxiously, ”rouse him and bring him back to

her? When she wakes she will surely ask for him——"

Portland, with a little sigh of despair and weariness, went into the antechamber.

It was well lit and full of people. The King was seated on his camp-bed—a dishevelled, pitiful figure—lamenting to himself with a violence and boundless passion that had the force and incoherence of insanity.

The only one of the company who had the courage to approach him was a new-comer, my Lord Sunderland; pale, quiet, elegantly dressed, he stood between the King and the wall, and gazed down on his master with an extraordinary expression of resolution and consideration.

Portland went up to him, not without a sense of jealousy for the King's dignity, that was so shattered before these foreigners and a man like Sunderland.

"Sire," he said firmly. "Sire!"

William did not even look up; he was twisting his hands together and staring at the floor, breaking out into the bitter protests of a mind deranged.

Sunderland looked sharply at Portland.

"What do you want of him, my lord?" he asked,

"I would recall him to himself that he may take farewell of the Queen," answered Portland sternly. "But he, it seemeth, is no longer William of Nassau."

Sunderland made no answer to this; he laid his hand lightly on the King's shoulder.

"Your Highness!" he said.

The ancient title struck some chord of memory. The King raised his head; Sunderland was certainly startled at his face.

"Who spoke to me?" asked William thickly.

"The Prince of Orange," answered the Earl, "cannot fail before anything—the King of England must not——"

"Fail?" muttered the King. "Fail? Have I failed? They put too much upon me. Did they tell you of the Queen? My enemies may be satisfied now, for I shall never lift my head again——"

"The Queen," said Sunderland, "will not depart in peace unless she leaveth you calm. Sire, for her sake will you not recall your ancient courage?"

The King shook his head in a faint, exhausted fashion.

"You would not have thought that she would die so young," he murmured, "would you—she was gay, too—there was to have been a ball to-night—and she cannot live till morning——"

Lady Temple came from the Queen's room and whispered something to Lord Portland, who instantly addressed the King.

"Sire, the Queen is awake."

William rose; his cravat and waistcoat were undone over his shirt, his eyes

bloodshot and dim, his hair dishevelled and damp on his forehead; he seemed to be making a tremendous effort for control; he noticed his disordered clothes.

"I would not frighten her"—it was Sunderland and not Portland to whom he spoke. The Dutchman drew back a pace. It was ironical that at such a moment the King should turn to such a man; but William had first roused at Sunderland's address, and seemed to look to him for guidance as he had looked, almost unconsciously, to him for support fifteen years ago, in the bitter days before his marriage.

The proud, stern, lonely, and scorned young Prince had then opened his heart to the dishonest, worldly, and cynical minister, and the bond of sympathy that must have been between them then showed now, when the King, fainting with mental agony, clung blindly to Sunderland's unmoved, gentle strength.

Portland marked it then and marked it now; he felt his own love useless in the face of my lord's charm. William had not even noticed his presence. He left him in the arms of Sunderland and returned to the Queen's chamber.

Dr. Tenison had been reading the Scriptures to her, and stood now by her bed with the Bible in his hand.

Lady Temple and her daughter were behind him. The younger woman was crying sadly.

Portland went up to the other side of the Queen's bed.

Mary raised her deep brown eyes and looked at him earnestly.

"My lord," she whispered—he bent over her and she caught his stiff cuff with feverish fingers—"do not let the King despair ... do not let him give up ... I shall have indeed lived in vain if he gives up ... so near too..." She paused to gather strength, and he was too moved to answer. "At first I was so afraid of you," she added wistfully, "so fearful of intruding on you and him—you were his friend before ever I came, and will be when I am gone—but of late you have tolerated me—only a woman, but I have not hindered his destiny—I let nothing stand in the way of his service—indeed, if I have ever vexed you, forgive me——"

"Madam," responded Portland tenderly, "you have been the great comfort of all of us, and we shall be utterly undone without you."

She shook her head on the tumbled pillow.

"I was only a foreigner—a stranger; you were ever extraordinarily kind to me—do not let the King stop—for this."

She fell on to silence, being greatly weakened by this effort of speech, and Portland withdrew to the end of the bed to allow Dr. Radcliffe to approach.

The Queen's words had roused curious memories in the mind of William Bentinck. It did not seem so many years ago since the fair, thoughtless, timid English girl had come, as she said, a foreigner—a stranger—to The Hague, unwanted, mistrusted, despised for her youth and her kinsman's treachery, regarded by her

husband as an interruption—a vexation—the mere burden of a marriage of convenience that had been a political failure; and now she had grown to be the support of all his designs, and he was brought to a madness of despair because she lay dying, and those same aims and endeavours which her coming had intruded upon, to his anger, were now nothing to him if she should no longer be there to share them.

It was now past midnight. The Queen, having swallowed Dr. Radcliffe's cordial, spoke again, and took farewell of her ladies.

"This was to have been our dance to-night," she murmured. "I am sorry to have spoilt your pleasure——"

"There will never be any more pleasure for me," answered Dorothy Temple, who loved her exceedingly, "until I meet Your Majesty in Heaven——"

Mary was silent, lying very still. There was a little stir in the chamber as the King entered, followed by Lord Sunderland, who kept his eyes on him keenly.

The King went straight to his wife's side, and lifted the glittering curtain up.

The silence was heavy as these two looked at each other.

"Tell me," he said, "what to do—what you would have me do——"

The Queen tried to answer; but speech was beyond her power; and when she found that she could no more speak to him, for the might of death on her tongue, two tears rolled down her hollow cheeks, and, by the size of them, it was seen that she was dying indeed, for they were large as the grey pearls in her ears.

"Give me one word," said the King, and he bent low over her. She made a second attempt, but in vain. A long shudder shook her, blood came to her lips, and the tears on her face rolled off on to the pillow.

"She cannot speak!" exclaimed the King; he fell along the bed and laid his face against her hand. Sunderland touched him. He gave a sighing sob like a woman, and fainted.

My Lord Leeds helped lift and carry him to the back of the chamber; the others remained about the Queen, who was sinking so rapidly that they feared she would go before the King recovered his senses.

She put up her hands in the attitude of praying, then dropped them and turned her head about on the pillow as if she looked for the King; not seeing him, she moaned and fell into a little swoon, breathing heavily.

The watchers held painful vigil thus for near an hour, when she opened her eyes suddenly and began to speak, in a distinct though low voice; but the words she used showed that her thoughts began to break.

"We have such a short time," she said, "what can any of us do?—I hope this will show you cannot expose yourself with impunity—I shall give God thanks as long as I live for having preserved you—think of me a little and be more careful—

Lord Nottingham saw my tears, I could not restrain—my father, my father, there is such a great light here, like the sun at Twickenham, no, The Hague—a letter at last—he loves, after all——"

She moved and half sat up; the lace had fallen from her head, and her hair hung in a dark mass over her shoulders; an extraordinary look of ecstasy overspread her wan face.

"Give me the child," she whispered, and held out her arms; then she coughed a little and dropped back.

A slight convulsion shook her; her breath clove her lips apart, and her lids fluttered over her eyes.

The clergymen were on their knees reading the prayer for the dying. As they finished, Dr. Radcliffe put out the candle, on the table by the bed, that shone over the Queen's face.

"It is over," he said; "Her Majesty is dead."

The Palace clock struck the four quarters, and then the hour of one.

The King opened his eyes and looked about him on the hushed kneeling figures. Portland endeavoured to restrain him, but he rose from the couch and moved slowly and languidly towards the bed.

No one dared speak or move.

When he saw the still, disordered coverlet, the shadowed face, the white hand on which the wedding-ring glowed ghastly bright, he put his hand to his breast, and stood for a full minute so, gazing at her; then his senses reeled back to oblivion and he fainted again, falling at the feet of the Archbishop, as that clergyman rose from his knees.

As he lay along the floor they marked how slight and frail he was, and, when they lifted him, how light his weight, and how reluctantly and slowly the heart that had beaten so high stirred in his bosom.

PART III
THE KING

"Man is God's masterpiece."

FRANCIS QUARLES.

CHAPTER I
VITA SINE AMOR MORS EST

Henry Sidney, Lord Romney, and the Earl of Portland were walking up and down the cloisters of Westminster Abbey. It was the end of April—a bitter spring following a severe winter; constant clouds blotted out the sun, and sudden falls of snow had left the square of grass in the centre of the cloisters wet and white.

The Earl, muffled to the chin in a red mantle, and carrying a great muff of brown fur, was talking earnestly to Lord Romney, who, though a feather-head and useless in politics, was more loved by the King than any Englishman, and of unimpeachable loyalty to the throne.

"This," said Portland, with energy, "is death or madness—nay, worse than either, for he is but a figure of himself that deceiveth us into thinking we have a King."

"God knoweth," returned Romney, who looked old and worn, sad and dejected, "never have we so needed his wisdom and his courage. Whom can we trust since the death of Her Majesty? Not even my Lord Nottingham."

"Sunderland," said the Earl, "is creeping back to favour—the knave of two reigns, who would get a third King in his clutches—and the Lord Keeper is very active in the House. Now I have done what I can to transact necessary business since the Queen's death—but I cannot do much, for the malice against foreigners is incredible——"

"No one but the King can do anything!" broke out Romney.

"I at least can do no more," admitted Portland. "And certainly my heart misgiveth me that this is going to be the end—in miserable failure."

"Why—not failure," protested the Englishman.

Portland paused by the clustered pillars which divided the open windows; a few ghastly flakes of snow were falling from a disturbed sky against the worn, crumbling, and grey masonry.

"Miserable failure," repeated the Earl; his fine fair face was pale and stern in the colourless shadows of the heavy arches. "Parliament needeth a leader, the Republic needeth her magistrate, the allies their commander—there is very much to do—with every day, more—and the man who should do it is as useless as a sick girl."

”I think,” said Romney, with some gentleness, ”that his heart is broken.”

”A man,” flashed Portland, ”hath no right to a broken heart. Good God, could we not all discover broken hearts if we took time to probe them? I know the Queen’s worth, what she was to him, and all of us—but is she served by this weakness of grief? He would best commemorate her by making no pause in his task.”

”That is a hard doctrine,” answered the Englishman half sadly.

”It is a hard fate to be a great man, my lord—the destinies of nations are not made easily nor cheaply. When the King began his task he was prepared for the price—he should not now shirk the paying of it——”

”It is higher than he thought would be exacted, my lord.”

Portland answered sternly—

”You surely do not understand. What was she, after all, but an incident? He had been ten years at his work before she came.”

The snow fell suddenly, and, caught and whirled by a powerful wind, filled the air with a thick whiteness like spreading smoke; it blew against the two gentlemen, and in a second covered their mantles with glittering crystals.

Romney stepped back and shook it from him.

”Shall we not go into the church,” he said, with a shiver, ”and persuade the King return?”

”It doth not matter if he be at her grave or in his cabinet,” answered Portland gloomily, ”since his temper is the same wherever he be.”

Romney turned towards the low door that led into the Abbey.

”Did you mark,” he said irrelevantly, ”that the robin was still on her gravestone?”

”Yes,” replied Portland; ”it hath been singing there since she was buried.”

They entered the large, mysterious church. The snowstorm had so obscured the light from the tall, high windows that the columns, roof, and tombs were alike enveloped in a deep shade; it was very cold and the air hung misty and heavy.

Above the altar, to their right, swung a red burning lamp that gave no light, but showed as a sudden gleam of crimson.

On the altar itself burnt four tall candles that gleamed on the polished gold sacred vessels and faintly showed the sweep of marble and the violet-hued carpet beyond the brass rails which divided the altar from the steps.

There was only one person visible in this large, cold, dark church, and that was a man in the front pew, entirely in black, who neither sat nor knelt, but drooped languidly against the wooden rest in front of him, with his face hidden in his right hand.

Portland and Romney took off their hats and approached the altar; they had

nearly reached it before they noticed the King, whom they had left at his wife's grave.

Their footsteps were very noticeable in the sombre stillness. The King looked up and rose, holding heavily to the arm of the pew.

Romney hesitated, but Portland stepped up to William.

"We had best return, sire."

The King was silent, his eyes fixed on the altar and the fluttering gold light that dwelt there—a radiance in the gloom.

Portland touched his arm and he moved then, with no sign of animation, towards the Abbey door; his two friends followed shivering in the great spaces of the church that were more bitterly cold than the outer air.

The King's eyes turned to the shadowed dark aisles which led to the chapel of the seventh Henry and the spot where the Queen, a few months ago young, and beautiful, and gay, now lay among her royal kinsmen, dust with dust.

The King opened the heavy door and stepped out into the bitter light of the snowstorm which hid sky and houses, whitened the coach waiting and the liveries of the impatient footmen who walked about in the endeavour to keep warm. The King himself was in an instant covered from head to foot; he gave a lifeless shudder as one so sick with life that sun and snow were alike to him.

He entered the coach and the two lords followed him; there was no word spoken; his friends had lost heart in the fruitless endeavour of comfort; he had scarcely spoken since the Queen's death, scarcely raised his eyes; for six weeks he had remained in his chamber, and now he came abroad it was to no purpose, for he took no interest in anything in life.

He gave himself much to religious observances, and was often closeted with the Archbishop; he uttered no word of complaint, never even had mentioned his wife's name, which was the more remarkable after the first frantic passion of his grief; he would attend to no business and see no one; he replied to the addresses of the Houses only by a few incoherent words; his answers as they appeared in the *Gazette* were written by Portland.

He fainted often, and his spirits sunk so low that the doctors feared he would die of mere apathy, for all their devices were useless to rouse him to any desire to live.

Portland could do nothing. M. Heinsius, Grand Pensionary of Holland, wrote in vain from The Hague; that long, intimate, and important correspondence was broken by the King for the first time since his accession; the allies clamoured in vain for him whose guidance alone kept the coalition together; factions raged in parliament with no authority to check them; the Jacobites raised their heads again, and, the moment the breath was out of the Queen, began their plots for a French invasion and the assassination of the one frail life that stood

for the forces of Protestantism; this was generally known, though not proved, but the King cared for none of it.

The home government, since the retirement of Leeds after the East India scandal, was in many hands, mostly incompetent; foreign affairs fared worse, for these the King had always kept almost entirely in his own control, and had scarcely even partially trusted any of his English ministers on these matters, that, as he was well aware, neither their knowledge nor their characters fitted them to deal with. Portland held many of the clues to the King's immense and intricate international policy, and he had done what he could with matters that could not wait, but he could not do everything, nor do anything for long, and what he could not do was left undone.

As the Royal coach swung into Whitehall courtyard the sudden snowstorm had ceased and a pale, cold ray of sun pierced the disturbed clouds.

The King had lately taken a kind of horror to his villa at Kensington, and resided at Whitehall, though he had always detested this palace, and the foul air of London was perilous to his health.

There was, however, no pretence even of a Court. The ladies, with their music, their sewing, their cards and tea drinking, had vanished; the Princess Anne, nominally reconciled to the King, lived at St. James's, and no woman came to Court now; the great galleries, chambers, and corridors were empty save for a few Dutch sentries and ushers and an occasional great lord or foreign envoy waiting to ask my Lord Portland when His Majesty would be fit to do business.

Without a word or a look to any the King passed through the antechamber to his private apartments. Portland stopped to speak to Lord Sunderland, who was talking to the Lord Keeper, Sir John Somers, the Whig lawyer, as industrious, as honest, and as charming as any man in England, and an extraordinary contrast to Sunderland in character. The two were, however, for a moment in league, and had together brought about that reconciliation of the King and the Princess Anne that set the throne on a firmer basis, though neither had as yet dared to bring forward my Lord Marlborough.

Romney, who disliked the everyday virtues of the middle-class Lord Keeper, would have preferred to follow the King, but William gave him no invitation, but entered his apartments and closed the door, so he had to join the little group of three.

Their talk was for a while of general matters—of the heats in parliament and the prospects of the campaign of the allies under Waldeck and Vaudemont; each was silent about the matter uppermost in his mind—the recovery of the King. Portland, the lifelong friend, upright, noble, stern; Romney, gay, impulsive, shallow, but loyal and honest; Somers, worthy, tireless, a Whig, and of the people; Sunderland, aristocrat and twice told a traitor, shameless, secretive, and

fascinating, by far the finest statesman of the four—all these had one object in common, to rouse the man on whom depended the whole machinery of the English government and the whole fate of the huge coalition against France, which had taken twenty years to form.

Sunderland, heartily disliked by the other three, yet master of all of them, suddenly, with delicate precision, came to the heart of the matter.

"Unless all Europe is to slip back into the hands of France," he said, "the King *must* take up his duties."

"This temper of his is making him most unpopular," remarked Somers, who, honestly grateful to his master, had always endeavoured to turn people and parliament to an affection for the King. "Though the Queen was greatly beloved they resent this long mourning."

"She held the King and country together," answered Sunderland. "Her English birth, her tactful, pretty ways did His Majesty more service here than a deal of statecraft—the Jacks know that; the country is swarming with them, and unless it is all to end in disaster—the King *must* act his old part."

Portland flushed.

"You say so, my lord, but who is to rouse a man utterly prostrate? Nothing availeth to draw him from his sloth."

"He is neither dead nor mad," said Sunderland calmly. "And grief is a thing that may be mastered. He should go to Flanders in May and take command of the allies."

"It is impossible!" broke out Sidney. "Did you mark him but now? He hardly lifts his eyes from the floor, and I have not heard him speak one word these ten days."

Sunderland answered quietly—

"A man who hath done what he hath cannot utterly sink into apathy—there is a spirit in him which must respond, if it be but rightly called upon."

"Will *you* assay to rouse His Majesty?" asked Portland haughtily.

Sunderland's long eyes narrowed.

"I am bold to try where your lordship hath failed," he said, with a deference that was like insolence; "but it is a question of great matters, and I will make the trial."

"You will make it in vain, my lord," answered Romney. "The King is beyond even your arts."

Sunderland delicately lifted his shoulders.

"We can but see." He looked rather cynically round the other three men. "If the King is out of the reach of reason it is as well we should know it, my lords."

Portland did not reply. He bitterly resented that this man, whom he scorned and despised, should gain this intimacy with the King's weakness; but he led

the way to William's apartments. He had practically control of affairs since the King's collapse, and no one questioned his coming or going.

They found William in his cabinet that overlooked the privy gardens, at the bottom of which the river rolled black and dismal in contrast to the glitter of the snow on the paths and flowerbeds.

The King sat by the window, gazing out on this prospect, his head sunk on his breast and his left arm along the sill of the window. The crimson cut crystal bracelet round his wrist was the only light or colour on his person, for he wore no sword, and his heavy black clothes were unbraided and plain; the considerable change in his appearance was largely heightened by this complete mourning, for he had seldom before worn black, having, indeed, a curious distaste to it. He had been born in a room hung with funeral trappings and lit only with candles, and for the first months of his life never left this black chamber, which had caused, perhaps, a certain revulsion in him to the sables of mourning, which he had worn only once before, when, a pale child of ten, he had been dressed in black for his young mother, that other Mary Stewart whose coffin lay in Westminster within a few feet of that of his wife.

He did not seem to notice that any had entered upon his privacy. Portland glanced back at Romney and the Lord Keeper with a look that seemed to convey that he felt hopeless of my Lord Sunderland doing what he had boasted; but that lord went forward with his usual quiet carriage.

A large fire filled the room with cheerful light that glowed on the polished Dutch pottery and rich Dutch pictures on the mantelshelf and walls. On a marquetry bureau, with glittering brass fuchsia-shaped handles, was a pile of unopened letters, and amid them a blue-glazed earthenware dragon that used to stand in the Queen's withdrawing-room at Hampton Court.

Sunderland paused, looking at the King. The three other men remained inside the door, watching with painful attention.

"Sire," said the Earl, "there is news from France. M. de Luxembourg, who was your greatest enemy, is dead."

The King did not move.

"It is a great loss to King Louis," added Sunderland. "They say M. de Villeroy is to have the command."

William slowly turned his head and looked at the speaker, but without interest or animation, almost, it seemed, without recognition.

Sunderland came nearer. A book was lying on the window-seat, he glanced at it—it was Dr. Tenison's sermon on the text, "I have sworn and am steadfastly purposed to keep thy righteous judgments," which had been preached after the Queen's death, and printed by the King's command.

Sunderland spoke again.

”The Whigs have ousted my Lord Leeds and his friend Trevor—and continue to press heavily upon him.”

Again it was doubtful if the King heard; he fixed his large mournful eyes steadily upon the Earl, and made no sign nor answer.

Sunderland, finding neither of these matters touched the King, drew from the bosom of his grey satin waistcoat a roll of papers.

”Sir Christopher Wren showed me these this morning,” he said, ”and doubted if he dared bring them to Your Majesty. They are those plans for the turning of Greenwich Palace into a hospital that Her Majesty had ever at heart.”

The three men watching caught their breath at the delicate bluntness of my lord. This time there could be no doubt that the King had heard; he made some incoherent answer and held out his hand for the plans, which he unrolled and gazed at.

”It should be a noble monument,” said the Earl softly, ”to Her Majesty and those who fell at La Hogue fight. Sir Christopher would have an inscription along the river frontage saying she built it, and a statue of her—looking along the Thames to London.”

The King answered in a low voice—

”Let it be put in hand at once.”

”Will Your Majesty see Sir Christopher?”

William lifted his eyes from the drawings.

”No—let him get to work,” he murmured; then, after a second, ”Do you not think it will be a worthy monument?”

”So fine that I can but think of one more worthy,” answered Sunderland.

A languid colour touched the King’s hollow cheek.

”What is that?”

”The completion of Your Majesty’s life-work.”

There was silence. The King paled again and looked out of the window.

”I cannot talk of business,” he said hoarsely, after a while.

”I speak of the Queen—her wishes,” answered Sunderland. ”She greatly desired the building of Greenwich Hospital, but she still more desired the preservation of this realm—and of the Republic.”

At this last word the King gave a little shiver.

”The Republic,” repeated Sunderland, ”needeth Your Majesty.”

William looked round again—his face was troubled.

”You speak to a dead man,” he said, in a hurried whisper. ”I have finished.”

”If that be so,” replied the Earl, ”we and the United Provinces are lost, and King Louis will triumph after all, yea, after all the toil, and loss, and patience, and endeavour, France will triumph over Europe. Your Majesty had better not have flung the gauntlet in ’72—better to have bowed to France then than submit now.”

The King seemed disturbed; he laid the plans of Greenwich down and moved his hands restlessly.

”I am not fit for—anything,” he muttered. ”I am not capable of military command—there are others—I have been at this work twenty years—let some other take it up——”

”There is no other,” said Sunderland. ”This is Your Majesty’s task, and no one else can undertake it.”

The King looked round in a desperate fashion; he saw the three men at the other end of the room.

”Why do you come bating me?” he asked. ”I tell you there is nothing more in me”—he laid his hand on his heart—”all is dead—here.”

A sudden violent cough shook him; he gasped with pain.

”In a few months I shall be with her,” he added, and his voice was so weak and shaken that Sunderland could scarcely catch the words.

”Doth not Your Majesty believe in predestination?”

William was silent.

”Doth not Your Majesty believe that God hath some further use for you?”

The King answered simply and with infinite sadness—

”I think He hath had from me all the work I am capable of.”

”No,” said Sunderland. ”Your greatest tasks, your greatest victories lie before you. William of Nassau will not die while the battle rageth. God, who put you in the vanguard of the world, will not let you fall out with the deserters.”

The King drew a sharp breath; he seemed considerably moved and agitated; his dark eyes turned to Sunderland.

”What is it to you whether I fail or no?” he asked wildly.

The Earl smiled.

”I stand for England, sire. Besides that, I always believed in you, and you are the only man in Europe worth serving.”

William flushed.

”You speak very boldly.”

”I spoke boldly to Your Majesty in ’77. I said to you then, you are the Prince for England—your moment will come. The little things, sir, often clog, and hamper, and bewilder, but in the end the big things win—as Your Majesty will win, though through wearisome ways. Sir, kingdoms are large stakes. Sir, to be a champion of a creed is a great responsibility, and he who taketh it up must forgo the grief of common men, for surely his tears are demanded as well as his blood.”

William sat motionless, with his hand to his side.

”You think I can take it all up again?” he asked, in his hoarse, strained voice. ”My God! I think it is too late.”

Sunderland turned and whispered something to Somers, who left the room; to the King he said—

"I entreat Your Majesty see a young officer new come from Flanders."

CHAPTER II
THE KING IS NEEDED

Sunderland remained by the silent King, on whom he kept his clear, strong glance; Portland and the beautiful Romney went into the antechamber, where they could speak freely.

"What charlatan's trick is this?" said the Earl, in a low, angry voice. "Who is this officer from Flanders? It is strange to hear my Lord Sunderland mouth these godly sentiments—he, a man merely fighting for a place——"

"Yet he spoke," admitted Romney, "and we were silent. And he roused the King. If it be mere self-interest it had the effect of sincerity."

Portland made no answer; he knew that he could not have spoken to William with the quiet tact and insinuating boldness that Sunderland had, but he knew also that he had served and loved the King in a way Sunderland could probably not even understand, and his heart swelled at what he considered calculated tricks to goad the King into filling a position where he might be useful to my lord; in this Portland's rigid honesty was unfair to Sunderland, who, though he was knavish sometimes in his means, was seldom knavish in his ends, and perhaps strove for as high an ideal as William Bentinck, though by different ways.

Lord Romney spoke again.

"After all, what doth it matter—if the King could be drawn out of his sloth?"

Portland's fair face was still dark and sombre; he rather despised the Englishman; he rather regretted the day when he had come to England to take up these perilous honours among a people who detested him. Romney glanced at him, gave a little shrug, and returned to the King's room; his love for William was of a different quality, his code was easier; he was thankful that the King should, under any circumstances, recover his balance, and he, Henry Sidney, could see no great dishonour in the public actions of my Lord Sunderland, and regarded him from no such stern standpoint as did William Bentinck.

He found the King had moved and now sat beside the bureau piled with the untouched correspondence. Sunderland was still at the window looking out

at the inky line of the river between the white banks and the slow progress of a barge with dull yellow sails that struggled with a sluggish wind past Whitehall stairs.

Romney went over to him.

”You have done much, my lord,” he whispered warmly; ”we must all be grateful.”

Sunderland turned his faded, powdered face from the window.

”He will finish the campaign yet, I think,” he answered.

The Lord Keeper and Lord Portland re-entered the room, and with them was a third gentleman, who went at once to Lord Sunderland, like one waiting for directions; that nobleman took him gently by the arm and drew him towards the King, who had not yet looked up.

”Sire,” he said, ”Your Majesty knoweth M. van Keppel, who hath been some years in your service.”

The King raised his eyes and saw the splendid figure of a young Dutch officer standing before him with great humility and respect.

”Yes, I remember you, Mynheer,” he murmured, with a faint animation, and speaking his own language.

Sunderland stepped back and the young soldier went on one knee.

”Are you come from Flanders?” asked William.

”Yes, sire.”

”From my Cousin Vaudemont’s force?”

”Yes, sire.”

”What is your business with us?” asked the King faintly.

Joost van Keppel rose.

”My business is more than I dare broach,” he said humbly.

The King looked at him kindly.

”I shall not be angry.” He exerted himself to graciousness, and his glance seemed to rest with a wistful kind of pleasure on the youth.

Certainly Joost van Keppel had an appearance well calculated to win the hearts of those who looked upon him, for a mingled sweetness and ardour made a kind of radiance in his face, as if he gave forth the light of hope and courage. He was tall and robust, of a bright fairness, with dark brown eyes of an extraordinary power and gentleness, a smiling, strong mouth, and a fine carriage of nobility in his port; his rich-coloured brown hair hung in full curls over his gay and vivid uniform; there was a great quantity of gold on his sword belt and in his shoulder knots; in the firelight he glittered from head to foot with a changing light of gold; but despite his youthful strength and the magnificence of his appointments the prevailing impression of his person was that of a gentle, soft, and winning sweetness that sat very graciously on the unconscious demeanour of a noble

soldier.

”Were you not a page to us?” asked the King.

”Yes, Your Majesty. I was with those who had the honour to come to England with Your Majesty,” answered M. van Keppel. ”Your Majesty showed me great kindness in promoting me.”

He had a gentle and charming address, an eager air of deference wholly pleasing.

”I had forgotten,” said the King. ”So you have come from Flanders?”

He gave a little sigh.

”Oh, sire!” cried Joost van Keppel, ”I am come to tell Your Majesty that we need you!”

The King sat up and looked at Portland and the Englishmen.

”Ah!” he said, in an angry, broken voice. ”What device is this you put upon me? No use, my lords, no use; this back will bear no more burdens.”

”Absolve me,” cried Portland. ”I know nothing of this——”

”A trick,” continued the King—”a trick to spur me. What are you, Mynheer, to come and tell me of my duty?”

M. van Keppel threw himself again on his knees.

”The King is needed,” he repeated, with great passion. ”I love Your Majesty enough to dare tell you so. Sire, the Republic crieth out to Your Majesty!”

”Who told you to speak thus?” asked William bitterly.

”M. Heinsius,” answered the young soldier instantly.

At that name the King changed countenance.

”M. Heinsius,” he muttered; then he fixed M. van Keppel with a keen look and added—”Why did he choose you?”

”Because Your Majesty used to have some kindness for me,” was the reply, given with a frank modesty; ”because no man living could revere Your Majesty more than I do.”

”I am not used to be so courted,” said William sternly. ”You have too ready a tongue. M. Heinsius may find another messenger.”

He rose and would have turned away, but the young man, still on his knees, caught the King’s stiff silk coat skirts.

”Will the Prince of Orange ever refuse to listen to the appeal of the United Provinces?” he asked, with singular sweetness and force.

William looked down at him, hesitated, then said faintly—

”Rise, Mynheer. I am not your King. As for the Republic”—he sank into the great wand-bottomed chair again and said abruptly—”how think they the campaign will go?”

M. van Keppel got to his feet and stood his full splendid height.

"M. de Vaudemont saith, sire, that if Your Majesty would come to lead us there is no question that the allies might do more than they have ever done." He paused a moment, then continued, "M. de Boufflers is guarding the banks of the Sambre; a great army is collected from the Lys to the Scheldt. M. de Villeroy, they say, is to fix his headquarters at Tournay; but the allies are ready to take the field—operations could begin next month. M. de Vaudemont and M. Heinsius have written so to Your Majesty."

William glanced at the pile of unopened correspondence; he flushed and looked again at M. van Keppel.

"Sire," said the young soldier proudly, "there is Fleurus, Steinkirk, and Landen to avenge. I rode past Namur a week ago and saw the Bourbon lilies flying above the keep."

"Namur!" repeated William, and his eyes widened.

The loss of Namur had been the worst disaster of all the disasters of the war. William had perhaps never known such humiliation as when the great fortress fell before his eyes.

"M. de Vauban," continued Joost van Keppel, "hath added to the fortifications of M. Kohorn and declared the town impregnable; they have fixed a vaunting notice over the gate defying us to retake it—but, sire, it could be done."

"There spoke a soldier!" flashed the King. "That spirit in my men wrested back the three Provinces in '74."

"That spirit is alive still, sire—they who drove back the French then could take Namur now."

William looked at Sunderland.

"Would your English be pleased," he asked, "if we took Namur?"

"There is nothing would so delight the people as a great victory in the Low Countries," answered that nobleman.

"So they defy us," said the King. "And Namur is even more important than it was; it must be the strongest fortress in Europe. Certainly it is a prize worth while."

M. van Keppel spoke again.

"M. de Maine is to be sent with M. de Villeroy."

"So they send M. de Maine to fight us, do they?" exclaimed the King. "We should be the equal of M. de Maine."

He looked kindly and steadily at M. van Keppel.

"My child," he said, "you are a good patriot, and that is the best thing in the world to be. We must give you a regiment. We hope to see you in Flanders."

He smiled, and the young soldier, who had been taught all his life to regard him as the first of living men, bowed, overwhelmed, with tears of pleasure in his eyes.

William gave him his hand and Joost van Keppel kissed it reverently, then, at a delicate sign from Sunderland, retired, followed by the Lord Keeper.

The King sat very quiet, looking into the fire. Portland came and stood behind his chair.

"Will you go out to the war?" he asked.

"Yes," said William simply.

Sunderland darted a sideway look at Portland, who flushed.

"I am indeed glad of that," he said sternly.

"That is a gallant youngster," said the King. "I ever liked him. I will keep him about me; he is a pleasant creature."

"He is," replied Portland; "a rakehelly good-for-nought, as every one knows."

William smiled faintly; he was the most tolerant of men, and had no interest in those faults that did not cross his designs.

"I have loved rakes before," he said, and looked at my Lord Romney.

The two Englishmen laughed a little, but Portland answered, with some anger—

"He is a young prodigal with more debts than wits; you should not have given him your hand."

The King did not resent his friend's brusque address, he answered quietly, in his weak voice—

"It would give me pleasure to pay some of those debts."

Sunderland softly put in a remark.

"M. van Keppel is the most obliging, sweet-tempered gentleman in the world, and one most devoted to Your Majesty."

"And a great friend of your lordship," said Portland, with a cold haughtiness. He perceived, as he thought, a design on the part of Sunderland and Somers, with perhaps Marlborough behind them, to put up a rival to share with him the King's affections, which had been wholly his for near their joint lives, and he could not contain his scorn and resentment, nor was he assuaged by the obvious unconsciousness of the King.

Romney made some attempt to shift the subject; he came forward in the easy gracious way habitual to him.

"Your Majesty will be soon for Flanders, then?" he asked. "It is a noble resolution."

William rose.

"I think it is my duty," he answered. He took up the plans of Greenwich

Palace from the window-sill. ”I think it is all there is for me to do. I thank you, my lords,” he added, with dignity, ”for having so long borne with me.”

He gave a little bow and left them to enter the inner room. As the door closed on him Sunderland smiled at the other two.

”Have I not succeeded?” he demanded. ”He is roused, he will go out to the war, I even think that he will take Namur.”

”You are very clever, my lord,” admitted Romney, ”and surely you have done the King a great service.”

Portland broke in hotly—

”You pulled the strings of your puppet very skilfully; you know how to deal with the weaknesses of men, but those who are the King his friends do not love to see him practised on for party purposes.”

”I stand for more than party purposes,” answered Sunderland, with sudden haughtiness. ”My cause is the King his cause—that is sufficient—and for the rest, my deeds are not answerable at the tribunal of your virtues, my lord.”

Portland came a step nearer to him.

”You scarce believe in God—you are little better than an atheist—yet all these terms are glib upon your tongue, and your tool, a shallow popinjay, can prate very nicely of sacred things. You are not sincere—you care for nothing—for no one.”

Romney made a little movement as if he would have stepped between the two earls, but Sunderland answered unmoved—

”I have my policy too much at heart to jeopardize it by expounding it myself. I fear that my principles would suffer by my lack of eloquence.”

”Your principles!” cried Portland. ”Your policy—what is it?”

”Too precious a thing for me to risk on a turn of the tongue, I repeat, my lord. I speak in actions. Watch them and know my answer.”

CHAPTER III
ATTAINMENT

It was the commencement of the campaign of 1695; as yet nothing had been done either side. The men at Versailles who managed the war had concentrated their forces in Flanders, and there the allies had gathered to meet them; the Elector of Bavaria and other princes of the Empire were encamped with the Germans

guarding Brussels; the Brandenburghers and Spanish lay at Huy; the Dutch and British under the command of the King of England, at Ghent.

The French waited. Villeroy was not Luxembourg; he had no genius for command, and he was hampered by the presence of the Duc de Maine, his pupil and his superior, who showed no aptitude for war, not even common courage. Boufflers watched the King of England, the meaning of whose marches he could not fathom; his oblique moves might cover a design on either Ypres or Dunkirk; for a month they continued, and neither Villeroy nor Boufflers suspected an attempt on Namur.

But on June 28th, the King, the Elector, and the Brandenburghers advanced with a swift concerted movement straight on Namur with such suddenness and rapidity that M. de Boufflers had scarcely time to throw himself into the fortress before the three divisions of the allied army closed round the walls of the town.

The Prince de Vaudemont had been left in Flanders to watch Villeroy. That general believed he could wipe out this force and then drive the allies from Namur—he said as much in his dispatches to Versailles; but M. de Vaudemont effected a masterly retreat into Ghent, and the easiness of the French Court was disturbed, especially as it was whispered that an action had been avoided owing to the poltroonery of M. de Maine.

M. de Kohorn, the principal engineer of the allies, had set his heart on the capture of the fortress that he had seen taken by his great master and rival, M. de Vauban. The Frenchman had since added considerably to the fortifications, and rendered Namur the strongest fortress in the world, and M. de Kohorn was spurred by professional pride into a desperate attempt to make good his failure of three years ago.

A week after the trenches were opened the English foot guards gained the outworks on the Brussels side; on the seventeenth the first counterscarp of the town was captured; on the twentieth the Germans gained Vauban's line of fortifications cut in the rock from the Sambre to the Meuse and the great sluice or waterworks; on the twenty-third the Dutch and English made conquest of the second counterscarp, and the town capitulated, Boufflers and the garrison retiring into the citadel, leaving behind them about fifteen hundred wounded men to be cared for by the allies.

On the 6th of August the allies, led by the King of England, marched into Namur by the St. Nicolas Gate, and prepared for the last and terrible assault on the garrison.

Villeroy, who had meantime taken the petty towns of Dixmuyde and Deynse, endeavoured to induce the King to raise the siege of Namur by menacing Brussels, which he shelled and greatly damaged; but in vain, for William was not to be lured into relinquishing his prey, and Villeroy, after two days, marched

on to Enghien, and, having collected the greater number of the French troops in the Netherlands, amounting in all to over eighty thousand men, advanced to the relief of Namur.

But the Prince de Vaudemont having now joined the allied forces it was considered that they were strong enough to face Villeroy, and at the same time continue the siege of the castle and hold the town.

On the fifteenth the French host fired a salute of ninety guns as a haughty promise of relief to Boufflers; from then to the nineteenth the two mighty armies faced each other, neither making any movement. Europe held its breath, Paris and London, The Hague and Vienna, Brussels, still half prostrate from French fires, Rome and Madrid waited in almost unbearable suspense for the result of the promised and, it seemed, inevitable combat between the two finest and largest armies that had ever met on European soil.

Boufflers burnt fire signals every night on his watch-towers, which urged haste to Villeroy, who still lay beyond the mighty ring of the confederate army who incessantly stormed the citadel.

On the nineteenth the King rose at dawn, got his forces under arms, and rode from post to post surveying his troops and watching the enemy; he was in the saddle from four in the morning till nightfall, and tired out three horses. When he returned to his tent that had been pitched in the encampment on the west of the town near the Abbey of Salsines, there was no portion of his vast army that he had not personally inspected.

He dined alone; the Elector of Bavaria and the other German princes being in immediate command of the troops that were actually storming Namur.

He expected that Villeroy would attack him as soon as it was light, and his preparations were complete.

He had an interview with M. Dyckfelt, who was with the army as representative of the States General, and was then alone, it being about ten of the clock and a hot summer night.

All the light in the tent came from a silver lamp suspended from the cross-poles, which gave an uncertain and wavering illumination. The King sat in the shadows; on the little table beside him was his sword, his pistols, and a map of Namur.

He was thinking of twenty-three years ago when, in his early youth, he had first led an army against France; his entire force then had numbered little more than the servants, footmen, and attendants in his retinue now. All Europe had been against him, half his country in the hands of the enemy, the home government in the control of the opposing factions. The man of forty-four looked back at the achievements of the youth of twenty-one with an extraordinary sense—almost of wonder.

He recalled with painful vividness how Buckingham and Arlington had come to offer him the shameful terms of France and England, their scorn at his rejection of the bitter bargain, and how even William Bentinck, gay and thoughtless then, had despaired. Hopeless, indeed, it had seemed; there had not been one to believe in him; but he had never doubted his own destiny.

And now he was justified in what he had undertaken, at least that, whatever sorrows, humiliations, and disappointments had darkened his way the outward semblance was of great and steady success.

The Prince, who had been little better than a State prisoner and a pawn in the politics of Europe, heir to a ruined family and leader of a despairing nation, was now a King, directing half Europe, with one of the mightiest armies the world had seen behind him. Of the monarchs who had offered to silence his despised defiance with dishonourable terms one was now dead, and he held his kingdoms; and the other, who then had threatened to overrun the world, was now with difficulty holding his own against a coalition that included all the principal countries of Europe.

Not without concession, infinite patience, endless trouble, and long waiting had William got these allies together. For the support and the millions of England he was paying a price none but himself could gauge the bitterness of. To Scandinavia he had had to sacrifice some of his cherished maritime privileges; Spain, the most provoking of the confederates, had been kept by much expenditure of art and money; the German princes had been held together by a title, a garter, a subsidy, an honour, a promise of a prospective dignity. Now, before the walls of Namur, the man whose genius and indomitable courage had, during twenty years, toiled towards this end, might feel that he was beginning to taste his reward.

He was facing France, equal to equal; he was feared and respected throughout the world. The Protestant faith, threatened with extinction by Louis, he had placed on a basis from which, as long as any faith lasted, it could never be displaced. His country was free, and prosperous, and foremost among nations again; the power of France was already too crippled for there to be longer any fear of her upsetting the balance of power.

The English fleet, useless since Elizabeth, again was mistress of the seas. Russell passed unmolested between Spain and Italy, defied the remnant of the French fleet imprisoned in Toulon port, and dared the whole of the Mediterranean seaboard. Berkeley passed unmolested along the French coast, burnt Granville, shelled Calais and Dunkirk, and kept the English flag high and undisputed above the Channel.

The man who had been the boy who had once passionately resolved to do these things found the realization of them different indeed to those bright

imaginings. Attainment of fame, honour, power, success could not give more than a faint remembrance of the throb of exultation the youthful Prince had felt when he, penniless, unsupported, hampered in every possible way, had first flung his challenge to overwhelming odds. Then there had been everything to do; but ardent courage and unspoilt faith had gilded difficulties, and the heroic pride of youth had smiled at obstacles; now the loss of a love the boy had never dreamt of had made all things else appear small to the man.

Twenty years of toil, of acquaintance with treachery, deceit, smallness, weakness, twenty years of misunderstood endeavour, of constant strain, of constant fatigue had done their work. The fine spirit did not shrink from its task, but never again could it recapture the early glow of hope, the early ecstasy of labour, the early pride of achievement.

What was his achievement, after all. He might well think that the God he had served so patiently had mocked him. He had loved but to lose his love; he had bartered his personal ease, almost his liberty, almost his pride for bitter honours held in exile; his health was utterly worn out, his days were a continual weariness and pain; he was again as lonely as he had been when he was the prisoner of the States; he had no heir, and the main branch of his family died with him; if he could not finish himself his task he must entrust it to strangers to complete. Surely all was utter vanity and vexation. The cold consolations of a sombre faith only supported him. He clung to those beliefs in which Mary had died, and faced the few years that at best remained to him with the same high courage with which she had met her fate.

He rose presently, in the perfect stillness, and went to the entrance of his tent, lifted the flap, and looked out.

The French red flares on the towers of Namur were visible across the great plain of the Sambre and Meuse; the starlight showed the huge encampment stretching out of sight under the clear sky: near by a sentry paced with his musket over his shoulder; it was very hot and not a blade of grass stirred in the absolute arrested stillness.

Presently a surgeon passed through the tents carrying a lantern and followed by a servant leading a mule laden with his chest. The light flickered awhile amid the canvas then disappeared; a dog barked and a man whistled to it; the silence fell again as intense as before.

The King went back and flung himself on his couch; he could not come near sleep, but lay watching the long, pale beams of light the lamp cast over the worn grass that formed the floor of the hastily constructed tent.

His mind kept dwelling on his first campaign, his miserable army, his own ignorance of all but book tactics, his lack of money, of authority—yet that had been the first spark of that fire that now lit Europe. He had formed and

trained his own armies—Dutch, Brandenburghers, Swedes, Germans, and lately the English—until they were equal to those consummate French troops who had laughed at him in '72; but they fought with no more devotion and courage than the handful of Hollanders who had rallied round him then, now incorporated into the famous Dutch Guards, the most beloved of all his beloved army.

He thought of these Guards marching against Villeroy now, feared and honoured, and his heart fluttered faintly with a fleeting pleasure that they should ever face the French on these terms.

He closed his eyes and instantly there spread before him a vision of the great banqueting hall at Whitehall hung with black, and the banners and armours of his family, while in the centre was a mighty catafalque of black velvet which bore an open coffin, at the foot of which lay a royal crown and sceptre. She who rested there was covered to the chin in gold stuff, and round her head was twisted her dark, curling, auburn hair.

The King sprang up and walked up and down the uneven ground; he drew from under his shirt and cravat a long, black ribbon, to which was attached a gold wedding-ring and a long lock of that same rich hair that he had seen in his vision.

He paused under the lamp and gazed at it; in that moment he prayed that he might find his death in to-morrow's battle with as much passion as any poor wretch ever prayed for hope of life. He was still standing so, forgetful of time and place, when he heard voices without, and hastily put the ribbon back over his heart.

The flap was raised and the figure of a young officer showed against the paling sky.

"Is it M. van Keppel?" asked the King quietly.

"Yes, sire." The speaker entered. He had been sent with the King's commands to the Elector of Bavaria.

"M. de Bavaria understands everything?" inquired William.

"He is quite ready, sire."

"So are we," said the King. "I should think M. de Villeroy would make the attack in an hour or so—the dawn is breaking, is it not?"

"The sun was just rising, sire, above the river, as I rode from the camp of His Highness."

"Yet the light is very faint here. Will you, Mynheer, light the other lamp?" The King spoke gently, but he had quite regained that command of himself which rendered his demeanour so stately and impressive.

M. van Keppel obeyed and was then retiring, but William, who was seated by the table, asked him to stay.

"I may have another message for you," he added.

The officer bowed.

William rang the little hand-bell near him and a valet instantly appeared from the curtained inner portion of the tent. The King lived very simply when at the camp. He now asked for wine, and when it was brought made M. van Keppel drink with him, which honour caused the young soldier to redden with pleasure.

"I hear," said William, "that the garrisons of Dixmuyde and Deynse have been sent prisoners to France. That breaketh the treaty we made for the exchange of captives—treachery and insolence, it seemeth, are the only methods of France."

"Treachery and insolence will not for ever prevail," answered Joost van Keppel, in his sweet, ardent voice. "The fortunes of Your Majesty begin to overleap the arrogance of France."

"There will be a great battle to-day," remarked the King quietly and irrelevantly.

The powerful summer dawn, strengthening with every moment, penetrated the tent and mingled with the beams of the two lamps. The King sat in the crossed lights; his gentleman knelt before him, fastening the great gilt spurs to his close riding-boots. He looked at Joost van Keppel gravely and kindly; his face, pale in its proper complexion, was tanned darkly by the Lowland sun; his eyes were extraordinarily bright and flashing, but languid lidded and heavily shadowed beneath; his large, mobile mouth was set firmly; his long, thick curls hung over his black coat, across which showed the blue ribbon and star that he had not removed since he had reviewed his forces yesterday.

"Mynheer," he said to M. van Keppel. "Lift the flap and look out——"

The young Dutchman obeyed and a full sunbeam struck across the dim artificial light.

"A fine day," remarked William; he was ever fond of sun and warmth.

As M. van Keppel stood so, holding back the canvas and gazing over the tents that spread across the plain of the Meuse, a gentleman, armed on back and breast with a gold inlaid cuirass, wrapped in a black silk mantle and carrying a hat covered with white plumes, rode up, dismounted, and entered the King's tent without a word of ceremony.

M. van Keppel bowed very respectfully; it was the Earl of Portland.

On seeing the King alone with the young officer his face darkened; he answered the King's greeting of unconscious affection with stern brusqueness.

"There are letters from England—I met the messenger," he said, and laid the packet on the table by the wine-glasses.

Joost van Keppel was quick to see the instant shock that William quivered under, and to perceive the cause of it. When last the King had been at the war not a post had arrived from London without a letter from the Queen. The young man thought Portland had acted with some harshness; he came forward and said

impulsively—

"Letters from England, my lord, are not of such importance that they cannot wait till after the battle."

This was to Portland incredible impertinence; he stared at the flushed, generous face with bitterly angry eyes; but William seemed relieved.

"Yes, let the news wait," he said, and rose.

"If this was known in London what would they say?" broke out Portland.

"How can it be known in London when I have none here but friends?" answered the King.

"I thank Your Majesty for including me with M. van Keppel as your friend," flashed Portland.

The King looked at him sharply, then from one man to another.

"Mynheer van Keppel," he said, "you will return to M. de Bavaria and tell him to be in readiness for a message from us."

The officer bowed with great deference and sweetness to his master and the Earl, and instantly retired.

"Will you not read those letters?" asked Portland, in no way appeased.

William gave him a glance between reproach and wonder, broke the seals, and looked over the letters.

"Nothing," he said, when he laid them down, "save that some sugar ships from Barbadoes have been taken by the French, that there is great uneasiness on the Stock Exchange."

"Nothing of M. de Leeds?" asked Portland.

"No," said the King; he was standing up and his gentleman buckled him into his light cuirass; "but I will not have him touched—he is punished enough." He added, with some contempt, "Is Leeds so much worse than the herd that he should be hunted from it?"

"A corrupt man," answered Portland gloomily; "but you were always tender with him."

William was silent. His obligation to Leeds consisted entirely of that nobleman's devotion to the Queen; he thought that Portland knew this and despised him for such sentiment in politics. Neither spoke any more on the subject.

"M. Montague is a clever man," remarked the King, after a little; "another pensioner of my Lord Dorset. How goeth the other, your secretary?"

"Ah, Prior," replied the Earl, "well enough, but I think him an atheist. His poetry is full of heathen gods, and when I probed him on the subject he was not satisfactory in his answers, but well enough."

"Put my Lord Sarum on to converting him," said William drily; "but I should not take much account of his poetry."

The King's gentleman went into the back part of the tent and Portland

instantly addressed his master with great heat.

”Sir, I must tell you that it is a source of great wonder to all that you should so encourage, favour, and caress a worthless young rake like M. van Keppel—a mere hanger-on to court favour; your dignity suffers by it——”

The King interrupted.

”Are you jealous—you—of him?” he asked mournfully.

”I have enough to make me jealous,” was the hot answer, ”when I see the creature of such as my Lord Sunderland creep into your affections.”

The King answered in gentle, dignified tones, without a touch of anger or resentment—

”You are indeed wrong. I like M. van Keppel for himself—I find him sweet and intelligent, a willing servant—and I have not too many. But you know, even while you speak, that nothing could come between me and you.”

”I think he hath come between us,” said Portland sternly; ”during the whole campaign he hath hardly left your side. I believe you even consult him as to your actions—he!—why, the whole camp knoweth his reputation. I could tell some tales——”

The King broke in.

”I’ll hear no scandals. You know that of me. If we are to listen to tale-bearing there is not one of us safe. If I favoured any man do you not think there would be tales against him? But I did not think to find you leaning on gossip.”

He still spoke with an utter calm; but Portland took his words heavily.

”If you choose to reprimand me——” he began.

”Forgive me,” said the King instantly. ”I thought you would understand. Indeed, forgive me. I would do anything in the world not to vex you.”

The return of the gentleman with William’s gloves and cloak cut short the conversation. The King fastened his sword-belt over his shoulder and adjusted the weapon; as he took up his hat with the long black feathers a magnificent Brandenburgher officer entered, followed by M. Dyckfelt.

”Your Majesty,” said the Dutchman quietly, ”M. de Villeroy hath retreated in the night—leaving M. de Boufflers to his fate.”

The Brandenburgher went on one knee and handed William a dispatch from the commander of the scouts, who had seen the last vanishing rearguard of the French.

The King showed no emotion of any kind.

”Count,” he said to the officer, ”you will go to M. de Bavaria and request him to make an immediate assault on Namur.”

When the officer had withdrawn, with profound obeisance, William turned to Portland.

”I will ask you to go to M. de Boufflers and demand a surrender. Tell him

that there is no further hope for him from M. de Villeroy, and that if he wisheth to spare his garrison he must capitulate to-day."

Portland bowed gravely and turned away. William looked after him keenly, then took up his perspective glass, his gloves, and his baton, and left the tent.

CHAPTER IV
A MAN'S STRENGTH

M. de Boufflers refused to surrender; he was a Maréchal de France, he had still many thousand men, including M. Megrigny, the engineer esteemed second only to M. de Vauban, and the castle was deemed impregnable. The assault was fixed for one in the afternoon. The King of England, the Elector of Bavaria, the Landgrave of Hesse, other German potentates and the officers of their staff gathered on the rocky promontory immediately below the ramparts of the citadel; before them rose the castle ringed with walls, batteries, palisades, fosses, dykes, and traverses, and set back two miles or more in elaborate ramparts and outworks.

The allies had formed a complete circumvallation round the huge fortress, and had opened their trenches at the very foot of the rock which M. de Vauban had fortified with such deadly skill.

The day was extraordinarily hot and cloudless; the sun, being now just overhead, blazed with equal light on the ruined town, the lofty castle, on counterscarp, glacis, and half-moon, on the trenches, the defences of wattled sticks lined with sandbags, on the distant spreading encampment of the allies, on the still more distant sparkle of the Meuse, which glittered across the great plain and on the walls of the Abbey of Salsines.

It shone, too, on a thousand flags, a thousand squads of men moving with bayonets and matchlocks set to the attack, and gleamed in the armour of the little group of gentlemen who were directing the operations, and sometimes sent a long ray of burning light from their perspective glasses as they turned them on the castle or the approaching regiments of their own troop as they defiled through the town.

It had been arranged that the assault was to be made in four places at once, by the Dutch, Brandenburghers, Bavarians, and English severally; the first three were tried and veteran troops, the fourth, however, consisted of recruits who were seeing their first campaign and had never been under fire before; the best

English troops had marched to encounter Villeroy, and had not been summoned to the attack.

The King turned his glasses on the trenches where these regiments waited; they were under the command of John Cutts, as brave and gallant an officer as ever breathed.

William put down his glasses and looked up at the grim citadel.

"This is a severe test for them," he remarked.

The Electoral Prince was taking a bet from the exultant Kohorn that they would enter Namur by the 31st of August. William laughed.

"I am sorry that Your Highness should put money on our failure," he said. "I hear that the betting in London is greatly in our favour."

"This is a matter of dates, Your Majesty," answered M. de Bavaria. "I say 'No' only to August the 31st."

"I am glad M. de Kohorn is so confident," said William graciously to the great engineer.

M. de Hesse, who wore on his finger a watch in a great ring of brilliants, remarked that the time was near ten minutes to one; M. de Bavaria bowed profoundly and galloped off to direct his own men in person; the King looked keenly round to see that none of his servants were lurking in the line of fire. Interference was almost as unendurable to him as cowardice; more than once during the siege he had been exasperated into horsewhipping some daring footmen or valet out of the trenches. During the assault of July the 27th he had been considerably vexed to see M. Godfrey, one of the directors of the new Bank of England, among his officers, and had severely reprimanded him for his presence in so dangerous a position.

"But I run no more risk than you, sire," M. Godfrey had protested.

The King's answer and the sequel were long remembered.

"I, sir," he replied, "may safely trust to God, since I am doing my duty in being here, while you——"

The sentence remained unfinished, for a French cannon shot laid M. Godfrey dead at the King's side. William had hoped that this would prove a lesson to useless meddlers, but even since he had been provoked by various people who had business at the camp, and who strayed into the trenches to get a view of real fighting, often with no conception of the danger of the slow dropping bombs and bullets.

But this afternoon the King's eagle eyes were satisfied that the works were clear of sightseers; it had been fairly well spread abroad that this assault would be, beyond experience, terrible, and those whose duty did not take them to the front were well in the rear.

M. de Hesse and the other Germans having galloped off to their posts, the

King remained alone with his staff, midway between the ramparts that were to be attacked and the English trenches, full in the cross-line of fire, and motionless and conspicuous as a target on the little jutting shelf of rock; his officers were a little way behind, and his figure was completely outlined against the blue gap of sun-filled air behind the rock slope.

He rode a huge grey Flemish horse, dark as basalt and as smooth—very lightly trapped with red leather linked with silver gilt—that he managed as well as a man can. He had always been renowned for his consummate horsemanship, and this great beast, that had taken two footmen to hold in before he mounted, he held delicately with one hand on the reins with such a perfect control, that the creature was utterly motionless on the narrow ledge of slippery rock.

The hot air was full of different distant and subdued sounds—the rattle of the guns, the clink of the matchlocks striking the cobbles of the town below, the tramp of feet, the neighing of horses, and, occasionally, the crowing of a cock on some farm outside Namur.

The King sat with his reins loose, holding in his right hand his baton that he rested against his hip. He was intently watching the English trenches.

The clocks of the churches in Namur struck one; instantly a loud report and a jet of flame came from the trenches below; two barrels of gunpowder had been blown up as a signal for the attack.

Before the smoke had cleared, all the minor sounds were silenced by the steady beat of drums and kettledrums, and the King perceived the Grenadiers marching from behind their defences and earthworks steadily towards the ramparts of Namur—these were the men of Cutt's own regiment. They were immediately followed by the four new battalions. They came on steadily, in good order, with their bright, unspoilt colours in their midst, their colonels riding before them. The King could discern the slender figure of John Cutts marching on foot before the Grenadiers with his drawn sword in his hand.

There was no sign from the castle. The English leapt, man after man, the last deep trench of their own earthworks, and suddenly, at a word from their leader, whose voice came faintly to the King's ears, broke into a run and dashed up the slope at the foot of the rock, and full at the first wall of the French fortifications.

Instantly the batteries of the garrison opened a terrible fire, and a confused echo to their thunder told that the other three divisions of the confederates were meeting a like reception.

The English kept on; the little body of the Grenadiers, with the four battalions supporting them and at the head of all John Cutts, climbed the face of the rock with no sign of disorder.

The King wheeled his horse round to face them, and his brilliant eyes never

left their ranks.

The French commenced fire from the guns behind their first palisade, which swept the ranks of the advancing English with deadly effect.

Almost every officer of the Grenadiers fell on the hot, bare rock. The drums began to give a disconnected sound, the colours wavered, but the men pressed on, with Cutts still running before them and the recruits doggedly behind them.

The King sent one of his officers with orders for the English batteries to open fire as soon as the breach had been made.

There was, in the space of a few seconds, hardly an officer left among the English, the colonels, captains, and lieutenants, who had dashed forward to encourage their men, were lying scattered about the hill-side—patches of scarlet and steel—with their riderless horses running frantically back towards the camp.

Still Cutts came on. The smoke was thick about him, but the King could see him clearly as he came every moment nearer. The Grenadiers had gained a firm footing on the ledge of rock beneath the palisade, and were about to hurl themselves against it. The cannonade was now supplemented by a storm of bullets. Cutts gave a shout, raised his sword, and pitched to the ground, shot through the head, while the thinned ranks of the Grenadiers rolled backwards down the rocks.

The King uttered a passionate exclamation; a bomb, cast from the castle, burst near him, and his horse reared frantically at the explosion. When he had quieted the animal and the smoke had cleared, he saw two of the Grenadiers coming towards him supporting John Cutts between them. As they reached a deep, natural gully that cleft the rock, one fell and rolled down the precipice; the other caught his officer by the arm and swung him across the chasm; the King galloped up to them.

"Is my lord slain?" he asked.

The wounded man lifted his brown eyes and laughed. Blood blotched the left side of his face and ran through the bright brown English locks.

"Why, no, sir," he answered.

"I am glad of that," said the King. "But your men are being repulsed——"

"God help me—not for long!" cried my lord, and dashed the blood out of his eyes, and with that movement fainted.

"Call up my surgeon," commanded William to one of his officers. Lord Cutts was carried out of the firing line, and the King again directed his attention to the English, who, leaderless, were nevertheless dashing forward, though without order or method, sheer against the French fire.

"It is too much for them," muttered William.

This wild charge was suddenly checked by a deep precipice blown in the rock by underground powder magazines; the raw soldiers stood helpless, baffled.

The air was of a continuous redness; the half-naked French gunners could be seen, running in and out of their vaulted galleries and crouching, behind the black shape of the guns; flying fragments of shell, masonry, and rock fell among the leaderless English, who hesitated, gave way, and retreated down the bloody slope they had gained, each rank falling back on the other in confusion, while a shout of triumph rose from the fiery ramparts of Namur.

The King urged his beautiful horse up the zigzag path. The bullets flattened themselves on the rocks about him with a dull, pattering sound; the horse laid back its ears and showed the scarlet of its nostrils; the King, with infinite skill and gentleness, brought it to a higher ridge where he could better survey the heights. The English, rolling back beneath him, looked up and saw him though the smoke, the sun darting broken rays off the star on his breast. He took off his hat covered with black plumes and waved it to them to encourage them to come on. A ragged cheer broke from them; they plunged forward again, but a terrific fire swept them back with half their number fallen. At this moment the King saw Lord Cutts, hatless and with a bandaged head, running up towards the glacis.

William rode up to him. The red fire was about them as if it had been the colour of the atmosphere.

"My lord," said the King, reining up his horse, "they cannot do it."

A young man in a splendid uniform came riding through the strong smelling smoke.

"Sire," he said, saluting, "the Bavarians are giving way—their general hath fallen——"

William spoke swiftly to the Englishman.

"Can you rally your men to the assistance of the Bavarians, my lord? 'Tis hopeless to attempt to make a breach here."

John Cutts smiled up at his master; he had to shout to make his voice heard through the rattle of the cannonade—

"'Tis done, Your Majesty!"

His gallant figure slipped, like a hound from the leash, into the smoke, towards where the English Footguards were retreating, and William, pointing with his baton to where he rode that his officers might follow him, swept round the ramparts to where the Bavarians wavered before the fire of the French. Regiment after regiment had hurled in vain against the palisades, the ditches and clefts were choked with corpses, and in every squad of men a great lane was torn every time the French gunners fired their pieces, while the Dragoons stood on the glacis, sword in hand, ready to cut down whoever should touch the palisade.

"They are very determined," remarked William calmly, glancing up at the red-hot line of fire bursting from the French batteries; "but so am I."

As he spoke a bullet passed through his hair so close to his cheek that he

felt the warm whizz of it; and another, almost simultaneously, tore through the ends of his scarf.

"For God's sake, sire," cried the officer near him, "this is certain death."

But the King took no heed of him; his sparkling eyes were fastened on the faltering ranks of Bavaria, who were being borne, steadily but surely, down the slopes, leaving dead behind them, their commander, and most of their officers.

At the very moment when it seemed that they had hopelessly lost ground, John Cutts came running up with the colours of the Grenadiers in one hand and his sword in the other, behind him two hundred of the English recruits whom he had rallied from the retreat.

The Bavarians, encouraged by this help, took heart and came forward again and began climbing up the rock; but Cutts and his English dashed ahead of them right into the cannon fire, forced their way through the palisade, and engaged in a hand to hand fight with the gunners and Dragoons, who were driven back from their defences and hurled over their own ramparts on to the bayonets of the Bavarians below. In a few moments the English had captured the battery, swung the guns round and directed them at the Castle. With a shout the Bavarians dashed through the breach in the wall and, climbing over corpses of men and horses, poured into the enemy's lines.

The King watched them as they scaled ditches and trenches and palisade, then made a detour round the fire-swept face of the rock to the point the Dutch had been ordered to attack. Splendid soldiers, splendidly commanded, they had already gained the position and with very little loss; the French gunners lay in torn and mangled heaps behind their pieces, which the Dutch were engaged in turning on the garrison.

William now gave orders that his batteries were to be brought in play from every available position, both on the ramparts gained and from every rock and out-work in the possession of the allies. He himself rode through the broken wall and took up his position inside the French palisades, where his horse could scarcely find a footfall for the dead and dying. The air was so full of powder smoke that the walls and turrets of the castle appeared to hang as in a great fog with no visible foundations; the crack of musketry was incessant, and little threads of flame ran across the dark heavy vapour; fragments of rock and wall rolled continually down the slope—dislodged by bombs bursting or the explosion of barrels of gunpowder. But this was as nothing to the cannonade. When the combined batteries of the allies opened on Namur, the oldest soldier could remember no such fire—it was a bombardment such as had never been known in war. The French gunners dropped one after another before they could put their fuses to their pieces, and were obliged to take refuge in their underground galleries; the roar was unceasing, and the continual flames lit up the rocks, the

chasms, the bastions with as steady and awful a glare as if the world was on fire.

A body of Dragoons made a gallant sally out on to the glacis, but were swept down to a man before they had advanced a hundred yards. The Dutch, under cover of the French palisades, picked off with musket shot every Frenchman who appeared within range, portions of the walls and curtains began to fall in, the sacking and wattles, put up to catch the bullets, caught fire and flared up through the smoke.

The King could scarcely see his own staff-officers for the glare and harsh blinding vapour. His ears were filled with the lamentations of the mangled and delirious wretches who lay scattered about the glacis, and the sharp screams of the wounded, riderless horses who galloped in their death agony across the ramparts and hurled themselves from the precipices beneath. The King caressed his own animal; the insensibility of his profession had not overcome his love of horses. He never could look with ease at the sufferings of these gallant creatures; for the rest, he was utterly unmoved. He turned his face towards the fires that made many a veteran wince, and there was not the slightest change in his composure save that he was more than ordinarily cheerful, and showed, perhaps, more animation than he had done since the death of his wife. Having satisfied himself that the Dutch had silenced all the French batteries at this point, he rode to the demi-bastion where the Brandenburghers fought the Dragoons in a terrible battle which was resulting in the French being driven back on to the fire of their own guns. Here he drew up his horse on the edge of a fosse that had a cuvette in the middle of it with a covered way along it, from which the French were still firing from platoons and muskets.

The King thrust his baton through the folds of his scarf and laid his hand on the tasseled pistol in his holster; he guided his horse commonly and by choice with his left hand, for his right arm had been shot through twice, at St. Neff and the Boyne, and was less easily fatigued with the sword than the reins. He now looked about him and perceived that his way to the Brandenburghers was completely barred by some traverses to intercept fire, besides by the fosse from the gazons of which the soldiers were firing, and, on the glacis which slopes before it, several gunners were hauling a battery into place; not far behind them a fierce fire was being maintained from a projecting javelin.

The French, lurking in the cuvette, saw the King, and, recognising him by his great star, proceeded to take deliberate aim. He looked round for his staff, whom his impetuous advance had completely out-distanced, then galloped his horse right along the counter-scarp in full range of the enemy's fire. A dozen muskets were aimed at him; he seemed not to notice them, but set his horse at a little fosse that crossed his path, and leapt over the dead French and bloody gazons that filled it. The ground on the other side was so cut, dissected, and

strewn with boulders and fragments of rock, that the quivering horse paused, frightened by the shower of bullets, and, not perceiving a foothold, the King slipped out of the saddle without leaving go of the reins, ran along by the horse's head, guiding him through the debris, and mounted again without touching the saddle, a well-known feat of the riding school. He was now almost up to the Brandenburghers, who raised a great shout as they saw him galloping up through the smoke. He rode along the front of their ranks and glanced up at the French crouching on their earth-works waiting for the assault.

The King drew his sword.

"We must get nearer than this," he said to the officer in command. He set spurs to his horse, and, wheeling round, charged straight at the lines of France, the Brandenburghers after him with an irresistible rush.

An officer of Dragoons rose up from his comrades and struck up with his sword at the figure on the huge grey charger. The King leant out of the saddle, parried the thrust with his weapon. The Frenchman, hit by a bullet in the lungs, rolled over with his face towards the citadel; the last thing he saw on earth was the King of England high on the distant heights of Namur with the column of Brandenburghers behind him and before him, through the glare the tattered banner of the Bourbons waving from the keep.

CHAPTER V
A LEADER OF NATIONS

When the late evening fell it was obvious that nothing could save Namur, the allies had advanced a mile on the outworks of the castle. M. de Boufflers sent to request a two days' truce that he might bury the dead who filled fosse and ditch. The King granted it. Before the time expired the Maréchal offered to surrender if he was not relieved in ten days. William at once refused. His terms were instant surrender or instant attack. M. de Boufflers capitulated, terms were speedily agreed upon, the garrison was to go free, the citadel, stores, and arms to be left in possession of the allies.

On the 6th September, under a blazing sun, a maréchal de France, for the first time since France had been a kingdom, delivered up a powerful castle to the enemy. It was the first obvious sign of that tide of fortune that had been steadily setting against France since '88. It meant more even than the conquest of the

strongest fortress in the world—it meant that the arms of Louis were no longer invincible.

The garrison, reduced to five thousand, less than half their original number, marched out through the breach made by the guns of the confederate army, which was drawn up in lines of foot and horse that reached to the banks of the glittering Meuse.

The French came with full honours, with the beat of drums and the ensigns erect, but their spirits were heavy with a bitter humiliation. Their reverse was as unexpected as it was tremendous.

M. de Boufflers and his staff came last of the garrison, the Maréchal decked with all the pomp of war, gold encrusted cuirass, silk scarf, orders, a splendid white horse trapped in gilt and crimson, and a blue saddle cloth *semé* with lilies.

He held his bare sword erect and his face was set sternly. He was exceedingly troubled by the ceremony in which he was about to take part. He would not, and could not, as a subject of King Louis, acknowledge the Prince of Orange as King of England, but it was difficult to treat a victorious general (and certainly a King *de facto*) with less than respect and retain his own dignity, especially as the astute Frenchman was perfectly well aware that William was King of England and would never be shaken from his throne now in favour of the old man who was wearing Louis' patience thin with his complaints and demands. Moreover Portland had insinuated that the allies would take any slight to William very ill indeed; so, between mortification at his position, his duty to his master, his desire to avoid the ridiculous and not offend the conventions of martial courtesy, the Maréchal was in a perturbed temper indeed. But as he neared the spot where the allied sovereign awaited him, even his dilemma was forgotten in his curiosity to see the man who filled so tremendous a part in the world, who for twenty years had withstood France, who had risen to absolute power in his own country, who had gained two kingdoms by diplomacy and a third by conquest, who was the soul of a huge coalition and one of the greatest soldiers in Europe, the man who was always spoken of in Paris with hatred and some fear, as an upstart, a usurper, a heretic, one who had broken through sacred family ties for the sake of personal ambition, and stirred Europe into a turmoil to obtain a crown.

This feeling was shared by every officer behind him. They were all eager to see the Prince whom they had learnt from King James to regard as a pitiless, cold self-seeker, and from Louis as a royal adventurer unscrupulous and impudent.

Not far from the castle the commanders of the allied forces were drawn up, the German Princes, the representatives of Spain and the Northern States and the United Provinces on horseback, and near them, in a calash, or light open travelling coach, the King of England.

M. de Boufflers reined up his horse a few paces away; a handsome young

gentleman with a very proud carriage, wearing a scarlet cloak, was the foremost of the group. M. de Boufflers knew him for Maximilien of Bavaria.

The garrison came on slowly past the four black coach horses held by footmen wearing the livery of England, until the Maréchal found himself face to face with the occupant of the coach and the Elector who sat his horse immediately beside the door.

There was a pause of silence; M. de Boufflers went pale under the eyes, and looked with the irresistible attraction of great curiosity at the man in the coach, who was surrounded by these brilliant and immovable escorts of princely horsemen.

He had heard the person of this Prince often described, and common report had drawn a picture of him familiar to the minds of men, but he found the original totally different, though there were the salient characteristics, the frail stature, the strongly marked features, the brilliant eyes, so well known throughout Europe.

But the swift and general impression he made was entirely other to what the Frenchman had expected. He saw a gentleman with an extraordinary air of stillness and repose, dressed richly and rather heavily in black and gold, wearing the George and the Ribbon of the Garter, but no other decoration, and a hat with black feathers cocked back from his face; he wore a long neck-cloth of Flanders lace, the ends of which were drawn through the buttonholes of his brocade waistcoat, after the English fashion. He sat leaning a little towards M. de Bavaria, and held in his right hand a cane with a gold top.

There was something in his expression, his bearing, wholly unlooked for by M. de Boufflers, who could put no name to it, but thought, in a confused way, that he had never seen a man whose principal occupation was war appear less of a soldier.

The King, without moving, fixed his dark, flashing eyes on the Frenchman, and smiled, almost imperceptibly.

M. de Boufflers performed the salute of the sword; he lowered his weapon, not directly at the King, but it was too high an honour for the Elector, and William alone bent his head in acknowledgment.

The silence was profound as the gleaming weapon was returned to its sheath. M. de Boufflers drew his breath unsteadily. He would go no further; he spoke to the Prince to avoid the royal terms of address.

"Your Highness, I must congratulate you upon your good fortune though it is my own ill luck—but I must console myself that I have held even Namur three months against such an army and such generals."

The Elector uncovered and, turning to the King, repeated with profound respect what the Maréchal had said.

William touched his hat in a formal salute silently. M. de Boufflers coloured with vexation. The deference of the Elector, so much his own superior, made his own attitude, he thought, appear ridiculous, but he haughtily maintained it.

"I surrender to Your Highness the keys of the Castle of Namur," he said, and handed them with a bow to the Elector, who at once presented them to the King.

"Sire," said M. de Bavaria, very lowly, "M. de Boufflers has the honour to request me to present to Your Majesty the keys of Namur."

William took them and again saluted.

"I, with Your Majesty's permission, will inform M. de Boufflers that Your Majesty is satisfied that the terms of the capitulation are fulfilled?"

"Yes, Highness," answered William gravely, but still (as M. de Boufflers was supremely conscious), with that slight smile.

"His Majesty," said the Elector, "is pleased to compliment you, monsieur, upon your gallant defence of the citadel."

"I thank Your Highness," answered the Maréchal, colouring deeply. Neither he nor his officers could altogether conceal their astonishment and vexation at seeing the proudest Princes of Germany treat William of Orange with as great a deference as his meanest courtiers used to their own master.

"We need not detain you, monsieur," said the Electoral Prince.

M. de Boufflers bowed over his saddle and passed on, his staff officers behind him, all riding at the salute as they passed the allied Sovereigns.

When the last had gone, William, who had never taken his eyes from the cavalcade, spoke to M. Dyckfelt who rode close to the carriage.

"Mynheer," he said, "you will inform M. de Boufflers that he is our prisoner until the garrisons of Dixmuyde and Deynse are released."

M. Dyckfelt departed with a body of Dutch cavalry, and, as the King drove off, he could hear the indignant exclamations of the French officers as the Maréchal was asked to deliver up his sword. The King drove to his tent across the town of Namur, which was like a barracks and a battlefield for soldiers and wounded. His bodyguard of princes raised a fine cloud of white dust from the dry roads, the air was still foul with the smell of powder and burning buildings, the sun burnt in the acrid heavens with a sheer cloudless heat that seemed to draw all freshness and moisture out of the earth, even the two great rivers had a hard, molten look in the glare as if they were lead, not water.

The commanders of the confederacy dined with the King; the tent was hot, but shaded from the intolerable glare by three poor scorched chestnut trees that cast a meagre shadow over the canvas.

The Electoral Prince sat at the King's right, the Earl of Portland at his left, and, for the first time, Joost van Keppel was at the King's table, an honour that was not grudged by any of the potentates, for the young soldier was exceedingly

popular, being amiable, generous, sweet tempered, and deferential, but Portland marked it with a bitter heart.

William, seated in a vermeil armchair, wearing his hat, and treated by the others as if they were no more than his subjects, gave the toast—"The allied army"—in a whisper to the Elector, who passed it round the table. It was drunk in silence, and the long meal, served on gold and crystal, began.

The King spoke hardly at all, save to utter a few sentences to Portland, who received them coldly, and the others were, out of deference, silent, all being, indeed, too elated with their recent great success (the greatest they had achieved during the war), and too occupied in their own thoughts with what this would mean to their several interests, to care for speech.

When the meal was nearly over, M. Dyckfelt came to say that M. de Boufflers, after protesting violently, had delivered up his sword and returned to Namur as a prisoner of the allies.

"We will send him to Huy until we receive the two garrisons," said William languidly, "though I doubt that we put too high a price on M. de Boufflers."

"His Master," remarked M. de Vaudemont, "must redeem him even at a higher rate."

"Ah, cousin," answered the King, "His Majesty will return the men for pride's sake."

"And there is the English post in," said M. Dyckfelt, "all in a reek from skirting Villeroy's forces."

"Why must you remind me of England?" asked William.

Portland interposed quickly—

"Surely you will return almost immediately? Is this not a good juncture to call a parliament?"

"This is not a good season to discuss politics." The King administered his reproof in the gentlest manner, but Portland, with a curt bow, instantly set down his glass, rose, and left the tent. William flushed, and a kind of tremor ran through the company. They thought that the King would not take this even from Portland.

But, after a second, he turned to the Prince de Vaudemont.

"My cousin," he said quietly, "will you go after my lord and persuade him that he is unreasonable?"

The princes glanced at each other covertly as M. de Vaudemont obeyed. M. van Keppel coloured violently; he knew perfectly well who Portland's wrath was directed against, but his anger was not personal but for his master thus openly slighted.

The King sat silent, drinking slowly and looking down at the damask cloth. In a few moments M. de Vaudemont returned alone.

It seemed almost incredible that Portland should refuse to return when sent

for by the King and by such a messenger; William looked up.

"Sire," said M. de Vaudemont, "M. de Portland asks your Majesty to excuse his attendance."

The King made no answer; he was outwardly composed, but the Elector, glancing at his face, guessed that his triumph was as nothing to him compared to the coldness of his friend. M. de Hesse broke the silence.

"M. de Kohorn lost his bet after all!" he remarked; "until this moment I had forgotten it."

"I am a hundred pistoles the richer," answered the Elector, glad of the discussion, "and yet I thought to lose—it was the victory of a few hours only."

William suddenly laughed.

"Gentlemen," he said, slightly raising his glass, "I give you the loser of that wager and the man who took Namur—Baron Menno Kohorn."

CHAPTER VI
THE KING'S AGENT

In a fine dark room of a mansion in London, three men sat in attitudes of bewildered trouble and despair, and a fourth, standing by a table of highly polished walnut wood, looked at them with a white, bitter face.

It was August of 1696, and exactly a year since the fall of Namur had induced France to consent to open negotiations for a peace. A Congress sat now at Ryswick, but with at present little hope of immediate success. The King was again with the troops in Flanders, and England was face to face with the most momentous crisis in her history. There was, literally, not enough money to carry on the Government.

When the King had returned from the last campaign, he had supported Somers and Montague in the recoinage scheme, by which the mutilated and clipped money of the realm was to be reminted; the plan was so daring as to frighten most of the King's advisers, but Montague, having secured a certain Isaac Newton as master of the Mint, proceeded to put his plans into execution with skill and address. He was also largely responsible for the scheme of the Bank of England, which, after paying a million and a half for its charter, had enjoyed the confidence of the Government until Robert Harley and Foley revived Chamberlayne's wild project of a Land Bank. The King, anxious for money to

commence the campaign and carry on the government during his absence, had passed an Act before he prorogued Parliament, establishing the Land Bank, which was to advance him two and a half millions at seven per cent.

The Tories declared that their scheme would soon ruin the earlier bank; Charles Montague thought so too, though he and most other thoughtful observers were certain that the Land Bank was an unpractical conception, a mere delusion. But the country was not with them; the country gentlemen, Whig and Tory, believed they saw an infallible way of obtaining riches, the King wanted the money too much to inquire into the means that produced it, and the Land Bank appeared to flourish while the Bank of England tottered and showed every sign of ultimate failure.

The Directors found it impossible to redeem the paper money that they had put in circulation, and that malice or necessity demanded the payment of. There was scarcely any money to be had; the mint worked day and night to turn out the new milled coin, but the moment it appeared it was hoarded by the panic-stricken public. The paper money fluctuated in value so as to be almost useless, stock jobbers caused constant scares on the Exchange, credit was paralysed, and the country was only held together by Montague's device of exchequer bills bearing a small rate of interest.

The discovery of the assassination plot and the Jacobite schemes of invasion had strengthened the King's position at home and made him as popular as he had been in '88, but it had resulted in the recall of the fleet from the Mediterranean, the renewed supremacy of the French in those waters, and the instant defection of the Duke of Savoy, thus causing the first rift in the coalition that William's unwearied skill had maintained against the arts of Louis for seven years.

He was now powerless to bribe or threaten. Early in the war Kohorn and Athlone had burnt the huge stores that Louis had built with vast expense at Givet, and France had staggered under the blow, but William was helpless to take advantage of it. The treachery of the Duke of Savoy, the state of the English finances, the general exhaustion of the allies, caused M. de Caillières, the French representative at Ryswick, to change his tone, go back from the pledge he had given that William should be recognised by Louis, and propound arrogant terms.

Meanwhile the letters from the King became desperate; only his personal influence kept the army, which was literally starving, together. He had pledged his private fortune and strained his private credit in the United Provinces as far as he could.

And the subscription list of the Land Bank at Exeter 'Change remained blank; only a few hundreds had been added to the five thousand contributed by the King as an example.

William even authorized the summoning of Parliament during his absence;

but the ministers dare not risk this expedient. He then sent Portland to London to represent to the Council of Regency that something must be devised to raise money, or, in his own words to Shrewsbury, ”All is lost, and I must go to the Indies.”

It was Portland who now faced the three ministers in Shrewsbury’s rich withdrawing-room.

These three were the Lord Keeper, Godolphin, the one Tory in the Council, and First Commissioner of the Treasury, and Shrewsbury himself, now again Secretary of State, and as devoted to the Government as if he had never, in an hour of weakness, tampered with St. Germains; he was, perhaps, of the seven Lords Justices now governing England, the one most liked and trusted by the King.

Portland’s usual slowness of speech and manner had given way to an animated vigour.

”The King must have money,” he said, ”at any cost—from anywhere; those were my last instructions, and, gentlemen, there is more than even the army at stake; it is the whole reputation, the whole credit, nay, the whole existence of England.”

Even the lofty-minded Somers, whose courage had dared the Recoinage Bill, was silenced; his lined, haggard, and bloodless face was frowning with anxiety.

Godolphin, even at this crisis contained and self-effacing, though looking downcast and sombre, fixed his eyes on Portland blankly.

Shrewsbury, emotional, overstrung, and harassed, broke into speech, flushing painfully from red to white as he spoke, the Colberteen lace on his bosom rising and falling with his unsteady breath.

”We can only obtain forty thousand pounds from the Land Bank subscriptions, and then under pressure and on hard terms,” he cried.

All the company knew this, but my lord was apt to waste words. Portland looked at him in some disgust.

”Forty pence would be as useful,” he said dryly. ”Come, my lords, this Land Bank scheme has ended in failure; but is there no alternative to declaring England bankrupt?”

”By Heaven, I can see nothing else to do,” returned Shrewsbury; ”but, since anything is better than lying down under misfortune, I have put some hopes on to these negotiations with the Bank of England.”

But it might be read from his tone that these hopes of succour from that almost defunct institution were faint indeed.

Portland began walking up and down the room; he was resolved, if it was within the bounds of possibility, to obtain this money; he had spent many weary

hours trying to screw out of Harley and Foley even half the sum they had talked of raising, and it had been so much waste time. The commission had expired a week ago, the offices in Exeter 'Change were closed, and Portland was no nearer the object of his journey. There remained now only the Bank of England, which had only been saved from bankruptcy by a call of twenty per cent. on its shareholders, and Portland could see no bright prospects from an institution, half ruined, whose directors were in an ill humour against the Government, and barely able to hold their own in the present crisis.

He stopped at last before Shrewsbury, and clasped the back of the chair beside him; his fair face was set, his blue eyes hard and bright. Perhaps he was the more resolute to do the King this service since he was deeply offended with him personally on account of Joost van Keppel's rise to favour, and their long and deep friendship had reached a crisis that could scarcely end in anything but a final severance of their affection.

"I will not return to Flanders without the money," he declared sombrely; "it must be found; if this Bank faileth Parliament must be called."

Shrewsbury answered in desperate peevishness—

"I have done all I could—I have been almost on my knees to the dictators—I am baited out of my life! By God, I would sooner be a hangman or a butcher than a statesman!"

A silence of despair fell over the little company. Godolphin wiped his lips, and looked out of the window at the sun-baked street; he was wondering, with a sick sense of personal failure, what would happen to him if king, government, and country crashed on ruin. Somers was equally silent, but his thoughts were far different; he would have made any sacrifice in his power to save the kingdom from disaster.

They were interrupted by an usher announcing, "Mr. Charles Montague." A little movement of interest animated them all. Portland turned wide, expectant eyes on the new-comer; his plain common sense was quick to discern genius; he had recognized it of late in the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as he had recognized it years ago in his master.

Mr. Montague advanced slowly, and seemed to enjoy the stir his coming made; it was obvious that he considered the brilliant success of his career entirely due to his own gifts—an opinion his colleagues considered as unamiable as it was correct.

He was a little man, and walked with a strutting air; his clothes were of the utmost extravagance of fashion, and glistened with gold and silver thread; his peruke was curled and powdered elaborately; and in the hat he held in his hand was a small flashing mirror among the feathers—the last whim of the mode; but there was a pride and containment in his sharp features, a power and purpose in

his keen eyes, that overshadowed any fopperies of dress.

He began speaking at once, and abruptly, but with much grace in the delivery.

"My lords, I am just come from the directors of the Bank. I have been closeted with them all day, and they have promised me they will do what they can. I asked for two hundred thousand pounds. I told them it was the very least there was any use in offering to His Majesty. And I told them it must be in gold or silver"—he waved his hand—"no paper, I said, for Flanders."

He seated himself, with another flourishing gesture, on the chair near Portland. Under all his affectations was noticeable a deep pride and satisfaction; the Bank on which everything now depended was his scheme; that of his rival, Harley, had ended in dismal failure. He felt that his brilliant career would be more brilliant still if his project saved the Government now.

"Two hundred thousand!" said Shrewsbury forlornly. The Land Bank had promised two and a half million, and the King's last entreaty had been for eight hundred thousand; but Portland caught even at this.

"It would be something," he said; "it would cover His Majesty's most pressing wants——"

"It is all," answered Mr. Montague, "that I dare ask for—in hard money—at such a time."

"We are fortunate if we obtain it," remarked Somers. "Is it promised?"

"No, Sir John," admitted the Chancellor; "for they cannot do it without another call of twenty per cent. on their subscribers, and they may not decide that themselves, but must submit it to the vote in a general court——"

"Why," interrupted the Duke, "there must be six hundred with a right to vote at such a meeting!"

"About that number, I think, your Grace," said Mr. Montague.

"Why, good-bye then to our hopes of even this beggarly sum!" cried Shrewsbury. "Are six hundred likely to agree to lending even sixpence to the Government?"

"Beggarly sum!" repeated Mr. Montague. "My Lord Portland here can tell you what long debate and diplomacy it took to secure even the promise of that amount——"

"Yes, I know, Mr. Montague," answered the Earl grimly; "and I think the sum worth any sacrifice. We *must* have it. Could you have seen His Majesty, gentlemen, as I left him at Attere, surrounded by starving troops on the verge of mutiny, sending off agents to endeavour to raise a few thousands on his word in Amsterdam, you would not consider two hundred thousand paltry."

He spoke with a personal emotion that surprised the Englishmen, who believed that his relations with the King were painfully strained. They respected

him for his loyalty, though none of them had ever liked him, and Somers at least gave him a quiet look of sympathy.

Shrewsbury broke out into half-hysterical petulance.

”Why are we doing it all? What use is there in any of it? We might as well give it up now as afterwards. I confess that I have not the health or spirit to endure more of it.”

Mr. Montague smiled; he knew perfectly well the motive behind every action he undertook, and what was the object of his labours. The younger son of a younger son, and ten years ago a Poor Scholar at Cambridge, he was now one of the greatest men in the Three Kingdoms, and able to confer benefits on the Crown.

”There is no living in the world on any other terms than endurance,” he remarked complacently, ”and a financier, your Grace, must learn to face a crisis.”

”The good God knoweth I am not one,” returned the Duke gloomily.

”When is the general court to be held?” asked Portland; his one thought to get the money from these men somehow, and return with it to the desperate King.

”On the fifteenth,” said the Chancellor, ”and I have sufficient faith in the patriotism of the shareholders to believe they will stand by His Majesty.”

Godolphin, who had been so silent hitherto that his presence was scarcely noticed, spoke now from the window-seat.

”You have done us a great service, Mr. Montague. I think we should all be very grateful.”

This came gracefully from a member of that Tory party that had supported Harley’s bank. Mr. Montague bowed, very gratified; my lord had that soft way of conciliating possible enemies with outspoken courtesy.

Portland made no such speeches; he considered it only the bare duty of the English to adequately support the King, whose life, ever since his accession, had been one struggle to obtain money from the English Parliament.

He took up his hat and saluted the company.

”I must endure with what patience I may till the fifteenth,” he said, and left them gravely.

He went out into the sunny streets of London, and turned towards the Mall. There was no coach waiting for him; he was frugal in his habits to a fault, and uninterested in any kind of display. No one would have taken him for anything but a soldier home from Flanders, tanned at the wars—an obvious foreigner with a stiff military carriage.

The town was very empty. The state of anxiety, suspense, and danger the country was passing through was not to be guessed at from the well-kept houses, the few leisurely passers-by, and the prosperous shops with their wares displayed

behind neat diamond panes.

Portland, passing the pillared façade of Northumberland House and the bronze statue of Charles I. on horseback, came into the Mall, past the tennis-court and archery butts, where several people were practising, to the pond covered with wild fowl and overshaded with elm and chestnut that gave a thick green colour to the water. To his right was a row of handsome houses looking on to the avenue of trees in the Mall, and at most of the windows people were seated; for it was near the turn of the afternoon, and a pleasant coolness began to temper the heat of the day.

Portland looked at these people: fashionably dressed women, with lap dogs or embroidery, drinking tea or talking; easy-looking men smoking or reading one of the new sheets which had flooded the country since the lapse of the censorship of the press—all comfortable, well-to-do, self-satisfied, and rather insolent in their enjoyment of the sunshine, and the shadow of the trees, and their own comfortable homes.

William Bentinck seated himself on a bench under one of the great elms; he felt bitter towards these people—towards England; he came near to hating the country even as they hated him; he had a swift impression that these lazy, prosperous citizens were the real masters, and he, and his friends, and the King, little better than slaves.

He looked at the women and recalled the poor Queen, who had had scarce half an hour's ease since she had set foot on the quay by the Tower; who had toiled and kept a brave face and a high heart, and done everything that duty demanded of her—and for what reward?—to be reviled, abused, slighted and, finally, to die of one of the hideous diseases the great city engendered, and be forgotten in the changeable factions that continued their quarrels even before she was in her grave.

He looked at the men, and thought of the last letter from the King he carried in his pocket; he saw some of the lines in it as if the paper was spread before him—"I am in greater distress for money than can well be imagined. I hope God will help instead of abandoning me; but indeed it is hard not to lose all courage." It seemed to Portland that Shrewsbury was right. What was the use of any of it?—what goad kept them all at their tasks? What was the aim of all this incredible labour, endeavour, fatigue, courage, and patience?

Did the King endure what he was enduring that these people might make knots, and drink tea, and sun themselves on the Mall in peace?

Did he, William Bentinck, who was fond of gardening, and a quiet life, and his own country, spend his life between war and exile, conflict and distasteful company, that the boys in the tennis-courts might play their games and laugh and shout as much as they wished?

If it were so, the objects seemed miserable compared to the labour.

But there was something more behind it all; Portland could not put a name to it; he supposed that one day God would explain.

CHAPTER VII
THE BANK OF ENGLAND

The Lord Justices who formed the Council of Regency were, with the exception of my Lord of Canterbury, waiting, on this momentous 15th of August, in the long gallery leading out of the Council Chamber in Whitehall.

Several other great men were there also; Sunderland, Romney, Wharton, the Duke of Leeds—still, by the King's clemency, nominally Lord President, though he had, since his disgrace over the East India scandal, none of the honours or powers of that position, and was indeed no more than a cipher where he had once been all-powerful—Marlborough—who, since the Queen's death, vigorously supported Government, while he waited with serene patience for the death of William and the accession of the Princess his mistress—Admiral Russell, and Portland, all filled by that anxiety that so nearly touched every one of them—would the Bank of England raise the money to carry on the government until Parliament met on the King's return?

There were two women present—Lady Sunderland, who was talking to Lord Romney, and Elizabeth Villiers, now Lady Orkney, conversing with much animation with Lord Sunderland. Portland observed her with very strong dislike. Though she was his first wife's sister he had never been in the least intimate with her; he could not forgive her the influence she had gained and exerted over William, who had taken her advice and consulted her opinion often enough when she had first come with Mary to The Hague. The usual tale-bearing, back-biting, mischief-making, and scandal had stopped this friendship, but not before her wit and intelligence had proved of great service to the Stadtholder, who, as Portland knew, had continued to employ her in delicate negotiations, even after he became King; and though she and William had scarcely seen each other for many years, Portland believed that she still used an oblique influence through Sunderland, with whom she had formed a close friendship, which Portland considered very typical of Elizabeth Villiers.

He suspected her of being in some deep intrigue to supplant him by Joost

van Keppel, towards whom his feelings were now near hatred. He knew that she had never liked him, and she was quite well aware that he had again and again told the King it was undignified to employ a woman in his affairs, and had even opposed the title and estates given to her husband on her marriage. Portland heard the tales this gave rise to if the King did not; Portland was vexed by the revival of old scandals if Lady Villiers was not; he loathed the woman and resented her presence here to-day.

As he continued to stare at her across the splendid gallery, she suddenly looked round at him, gave Sunderland a quick sentence, and to Portland's equal surprise and vexation crossed over to him.

"It is a long time since we have met," she said, and gave one of her straight smiles.

She was dressed in violet and silver, and wore a great Indian scarf about her shoulders as if it were cold, instead of August.

"I have been too employed to wait on your ladyship," answered Portland.

She took no notice of that, but said abruptly—

"How did you leave the King?"

"As much at ease as a man in his position could be," said the Earl grimly.

Lady Orkney did not look at Portland, but rather absently down the room.

"He must be fairly weary of it all," she replied. "Do you think," she added rather sharply, "he hath recovered from the death of the Queen?"

"No, madam, nor will he ever," said my lord sternly.

"How you dislike me!" cried Lady Orkney softly. "And I would have been a good friend to you if you would have let me—believe me"—she looked at him full now—"I would never do an ill turn to one of the King's friends."

"What is this, madam?" he asked haughtily.

"Oh, you understand," she answered. "You know that M. van Keppel is a friend of mine, and you have tried to do him ill offices—I tell you that you have no cause—Joost van Keppel will harm nobody. Let him be."

Portland was silent in sheer disdain. Elizabeth Villiers fixed him with her queer eyes; her pronounced cast was very noticeable.

"You should not dislike me," she said, "because I sometimes help the King—Joost van Keppel will help him too, even in such follies as courtesy and an obliging temper—a sweet reverence might mean much to a broken man—consider that, my lord."

He answered brusquely.

"I consider that Joost van Keppel is a worthless young rake-hell, and that those who push him into His Majesty's favour can have only mean motives."

"You certainly do not understand," she said quietly.

A sudden thought flashed to Portland.

”Was it you, my lady,” he asked, ”who put Sunderland to bring van Keppel forward with his tale of Namur when the King was sick?”

”Have you only just guessed it?” she answered.

”I might have known it was a woman’s trick,” he said bitterly. ”What made you think of such a device?”

She smiled and made no answer.

”And why did you employ M. van Keppel?” added Portland.

”Because,” said Lady Orkney, ”he was of the age the King’s son might have been.”

Portland stared.

”A woman’s trick, you see.” She smiled. ”Women think of these things—do not consider me as a vulgar intriguer, even if you cannot understand, and let M. van Keppel be—I think he will console the King a little.”

”I, at least, am above your devices and those of my Lord Sunderland,” he answered roughly.

Lady Orkney replied, still smiling, but with infinite sadness—

”Could you see into my heart you would know that I am not so happy but that you might spare me.”

She gave a little courtsey and left him. He watched her return to the window and look out at the alleys and parterres of the privy garden.

He had been a little confused, but in no way appeased by her conversation. She had confessed that she and Sunderland were behind van Keppel, towards whom his thoughts turned with added dislike; then he tried to banish consideration of all three of them, and to fix his mind on the money he must obtain for the King.

Devonshire (the Lord Steward), Pembroke (Keeper of the Privy Seal), and Dorset (the Lord Chamberlain), were talking apart, and Portland joined them.

Pembroke informed him that Montague had gone down to the General Meeting of the Bank of England and had promised to return immediately with the news of the result of the Directors’ proposition to the Company.

”If these hopes vanish,” said Devonshire gloomily, ”what are we to turn to next?”

”A Parliament and taxes,” answered Dorset concisely.

”Oh, my lord,” cried Pembroke, ”Mr. Locke will tell you that is bad finance.”

”Mr. Locke is a philosopher,” remarked Dorset good-humouredly.

”Good God, we get choked with ’em,” remarked the magnificent Devonshire. ”Now Montague hath brought Mr. Newton into the Mint and Somers is always deep with Mr. Locke——”

”And my Lord Portland,” cried Dorset, with the irrepressible levity of his class and nation, ”deep with a poet for his secretary.”

"As for that same poet," said Portland gravely, "I tell you, my lord, that he now goeth to Church, and will not write profane verses on a Sabbath."

"A triumph indeed for the godliness of your lordship," said Devonshire demurely.

"Is this poor Matt Prior?" asked Dorset. "His verses on the taking of Namur were very neat."

"I did not read them," answered Portland dryly. "I never could endure poetry or play-acting—the King is plagued with enough to paper London."

"I remember in The Hague," smiled Devonshire, "when His Majesty was expecting a promise of money from Amsterdam by every post, and I took in a letter which I thought was it—but which proved to be a copy of verses on his safe crossing from England, with a fresh heathen god in every line—His Majesty's curses were powerful for a Christian Prince—and he declared it had given him a distaste for the very sight of poetry."

Dorset laughed; he remembered the occasion also as the only one on which he had heard violent language from the austere King. Portland was disgusted that they could amuse themselves with these recollections during such anxious moments; it was only another proof, he thought, of the shallowness of the English politicians. And even these anecdotes turned on the King's lack of money; it must be six years since Devonshire was at The Hague, and William was still in the same straits. Portland wondered if the time would ever come when he would be free of these burdens, and doubted it.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer entered the gallery, and instantly everybody formed a little group about him, including the two ladies, to whom he gave a flourishing and gallant greeting.

"I must tell you," he said, in a voice and with a manner that strove to be indifferent, yet with a face flushed with pride, "that the money hath been subscribed to His Majesty."

Portland drew a great breath of relief.

"Promised," continued Montague, "in gold and silver, which will be ready to be packed up and taken to Flanders to-morrow."

"How was this accomplished?" asked Devonshire. "I hardly thought, this cruel year, they could do it."

"Thank God they have," murmured Shrewsbury; "for if this had failed I know not what we should have done."

"Your Grace," answered Mr. Montague, "when I lent my support to this Bank I did not think it was likely to be a failure. Yet I must confess that I had some misgivings to-day when I entered the General Court—there was my Lord Mayor in the chair, looking as gloomy as need be, and six hundred or more of the company, all thrifty merchants. Sir John got up and read the speech composed

by the Directors and sat down again in none too easy a frame of mind, it seemed, and a great hum went up from the subscribers, and you might see them turning to each other and whispering, but making no kind of public response; then up sprang Sir John again, and implored them stand by the King—at which one rose and said, 'We desire nothing more than to oblige His Majesty, but it is a hard thing to ask for gold these times, and our notes of hand should be good enough.' 'Nothing but gold is any use to His Majesty in Flanders,' declared Sir John. 'I am asking you for this sacrifice for nothing less than the preservation of the kingdoms, otherwise I could not in conscience do it.' At last, after some murmuring, it was put to the vote, and all held up their hands for sending the money, and Sir John came to me all in a tremble, and hoped I would remember that the Bank had saved the Government—he said it had been as anxious an hour as he was ever like to have in his life. At hearing the resolution of the Bank, several gentlemen, who had been waiting without, came in to buy shares, and several thousand pounds' worth were subscribed before I left."

At the conclusion of this speech Mr. Montague looked round his company with an air of conscious satisfaction. Portland had gone to write this news off to the King, caring indeed for nothing but the sheer fact that he could return to Attere immediately with the money, but the others, including even the feeble, disgraced Leeds, had listened with eager interest.

"Well done," cried Lady Orkney. "Mr. Montague, you are a miracle of wit—and I am going to follow the example of these same gentlemen and purchase stock in this Bank of yours."

"So am I," declared Devonshire. "I will send my agent down there to-night, sir, the service it hath done cannot be overestimated."

In a breath every Minister in the room had promised to show the same instance of attachment to the institution that had saved the Government, and when the energetic young Chancellor left Whitehall the congratulations of the whole Council of Regency were ringing in his ears.

He entered his smart coach and drove straight to the Mint, where men were working day and night at the milled money which he and his friend Mr. Newton were turning out at the rate of a hundred and twenty thousand a week. Fifteen thousand was the highest amount the former master of the Mint had declared it was possible to produce in that time, but Mr. Newton had done the incredible in reforming the Mint. It was to his apartments Charles Montague went now, twirling his cane and fluttering his laces.

The Warden of His Majesty's Mint and Exchanges and Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge was a gentleman a little past middle life, of a very refined aristocratic appearance, with an air of extraordinary calm and stillness.

He wore a murrey-coloured coat, a small grey peruke, and a little brooch

of rubies in a plain lace cravat. When Mr. Montague entered he was seated at a table covered with a multitude of papers. He looked up instantly; his delicate features expressed a very winning composed dignity.

"I wished to speak to you about the new Mint at Chester, Mr. Newton," said the Chancellor; his manner was totally different from that he had used to the Ministers at Whitehall.

"Another Mint, yes, Mr. Montague," answered the Warden, in the same grave tone. "Those at York and Norwich have been very popular, but I fear we have not enough trained men to spare yet—though I am having them taught as fast as may be."

"I want more than will suffice for Chester," said the Chancellor briskly. "I thought of York and Exeter as likely stations."

He seated himself by the window and looked out on the pleasant prospect of the sunny river and glistening roofs.

"The people take it very well," he added. "One could not have hoped to pass through the crisis better; there is a good temper and a good sense shown very gratifying."

"Why, yes," said Mr. Newton; "but one may always look for both from the English."

A servant entered with a letter, which he glanced at and laid down with a gentle little sound of displeasure.

"What is that?" asked Mr. Montague.

"Oh, 'tis from Flamsteed; he is ever dunning me to go see his observatory at Greenwich—he cannot believe that there is anything in the world more important than stars, nor that I do not love to be teased with mathematical things when I am about the King's business."

Mr. Montague glanced at the astronomer's sealed letter.

"Speaking of the King's business," he remarked, "the Bank of England hath promised to advance the two hundred thousand for the troops in Flanders."

Mr. Newton looked up quickly.

"Why, I am glad of that. Sir, this is a great thing—it will greatly raise the credit of the Bank."

"I think," replied the young Chancellor, "without vanity, that the Bank of England is an institution that will live."

CHAPTER VIII

THE BREAKING FRIENDSHIP

Two men were riding side by side through the forest of Soignies; before and behind them was a great army. It was a May night, with the moon full overhead and casting long shadows from the tall, dark, motionless trees. News had been received at the camp the evening before that the French were threatening Brussels, and the confederate army was marching to save the Capital.

These two men who rode in the centre were alone, though part of such an immense force; for the Dutch guards, who marched before and behind them were several yards distant; they were both wrapped in long military cloaks. One, who was the King-Stadtholder, the commander of the allies, was mounted on a white horse; the other, William Bentinck, Earl of Portland, rode a great brown steed. The King was speaking very earnestly, in a lowered voice suited to the hush of the warm night and the solemnity of the long denies they traversed.

"I must tell you of the dispatch I received from my Lord Devonshire. I had scarcely received it before we broke camp, or I had told you before. This John Fenwick, the Jacobite, hath made a cunning confession, designed to put the Government into a confusion. He accuseth Godolphin, Shrewsbury, Marlborough, and Russell of being deep with St. Germains."

Portland made no answer.

"It was," continued the King, "no news to me, as you know."

"What have you done?" asked the Earl.

"I have done nothing yet. I shall write to Devonshire ordering the trial of this Fenwick to proceed."

"And for these lords?"

"I shall affect to disbelieve this evidence," answered William. "And Shrewsbury, at least, I shall assure of my trust."

"And so traitors flourish!"

There was silence for awhile, only broken by the jingle of the harness, the fall of the horses' feet, and the tramp of the army before and behind. The faces of the two men were hidden from each other; they could only discern outline of horse and figure as the moonlight fell between the elms and oaks.

The King spoke again.

"I have learnt to be tolerant of treason. These men serve me—even Marlborough—instruments all of them! And Shrewsbury I ever liked. I will not have him put out for this."

"You will even let them remain in office?"

"Surely," answered the King, "it would be beneath me to stoop to

vengeance? And what else would this be? Both policy and kindness dictate to me this course."

Portland's voice came heavily out of the morning shadows.

"You are too lenient to every sort of fault. These men do not even know you spare them—they think you are fooled. Marlborough will laugh at you."

"What doth that matter if he serveth my turn? He is a villain, but a great man—he should be useful to England."

The King spoke in strained, weary accents, and with, it seemed, but little interest.

"Besides," he added, "I do not believe half of what Fenwick saith."

Portland retorted sharply.

"You did not believe the assassination plot itself until I produced Prendergrass, who had heard them discuss who was to fire the bullet on Turnham Green."

The King answered simply—

"One becometh so well used to these attempts, I should have been dead ten times if assassins could have done it. That was not the way ordained."

"I hope," said Portland dryly, "that your clemency will be rewarded. I, for one, could well wish to see these traitors come to their punishment—yea, and such men as Sunderland——"

William interrupted.

"I hope they will leave me Sunderland—I could ill do without him. But I hear he is likely to be pressed hard in the Commons."

"I cannot wonder," returned Portland, "but only at you who continue to employ such a man."

The King did not answer at once. The moon was sinking and taking on a yellow colour, the shadows were fainter and blended one with another, the trunks, branches, and clustering leaves of the great trees began to show dimly against a paling sky; there was a deep stir of freshness in the still air, the perfume of grass, bracken, and late violets. The steady, unbroken tramp of the great army seemed to grow louder with the first lifting of the night; the men, in ranks of not more than four, could be seen defiling through the yet dark forest.

The King spoke, looking ahead of him.

"Of late I can do nothing to please you," he said in a whisper. "It is not pleasant to me to have this growing coldness."

"Your Majesty hath other friends," answered Portland bitterly.

"You are unreasonable," said the King, in the same sad, broken voice. "I cannot withdraw my favour from M. van Keppel—justice and dignity forbid it. You should understand that, William. I also might have my complaints; it is not easy for me to keep the peace between you and M. van Keppel. Your constant quarrels make my household in a perpetual tumult—and, I must say it, it is not

M. van Keppel who is generally the aggressor."

"His presence is an offence," declared Portland hotly; "a creature of my Lord Sunderland, a flattering, smooth-tongued boy—a dissolute rake who hath done nothing for your service!"

The King turned his face towards his friend.

"It cuts me to the heart," he said, with great emotion, "that you should dream—for one second—that he could make me ever forget or undervalue all the services I owe to you. Nothing could alter my affection for you; it is my great grief that you should not feel that as I do."

"You have changed," was all Portland said.

The King lifted his eyes to the sky showing between the trees they rode past, his haggard face was faintly visible in the increasing light.

"Yes, I have changed," he said slowly. "Perhaps even you cannot guess how much. I could not convey to you how utterly indifferent all the world is to me save only my hope to a little more complete the task God put upon me. Your friendship is all that is left to me. Nothing hath been real since—she—died. I only act and think and go through my days because I believe she would have wished it. I only do this and that because I think—she would have done it. I only keep on because she wished that, even at the last. I only endure to live because I dare to hope she may be somewhere—waiting——"

His voice sank so low as to be almost incoherent; Portland could scarcely catch the words. They came to a little hollow beside the path that was filled with spring flowers opening to the dawn, daisies and lilies and tufts of fresh green.

The King spoke again.

"For the rest, all is dead—here," he lightly touched his heart. "You alone have the power to hurt me, and you should use it tenderly."

Portland had meant to resign his position in the King's household, so intolerable had it become to him, but now restrained himself.

"I will serve you till death," he said, with his air of cold, high breeding. "Your Majesty must believe that of me."

William gave a little sigh.

"What of this Congress at Ryswick?" added Portland, "and your suggestion that I should see M. de Boufflers?"

He thought that it would be something of a compromise if he could still continue to serve the King yet get away from the odious van Keppel.

"They will never do anything at Ryswick," answered the King wearily. "They fill their time with ceremonies and vexations, and this time a hundred years might find them still arguing there. And I am resolute for peace now as all my life I have been resolute for war. No need to explain my policy to you. We shall never get better terms than France offereth now, and they must not be lost

through the intolerable impertinences of Spain, who hath contributed nothing but rigmaroles to the coalition from the first."

"I think," said Portland, "I could get some satisfaction from M. de Boufflers."

The French Maréchal had formed a friendship with Portland when he had been his prisoner at Huy, after the fall of Namur, and it had recently occurred to William to use this friendship to open negotiations between England and France, regardless of the formal mummeries of the Congress, which seemed to be likely to be as protracted as that held at Nymwegen in '79.

It was William's object to discover if Louis was in earnest. The listlessness of Spain, the ambition of the Emperor must bow if once France, England, and Holland came to terms. What he proposed was daring and unconstitutional. He had not informed a single English politician of his plan, and Portland, whom he thought to employ, was not even an Englishman, but William was never stopped by any fear of responsibility. If he could accomplish an honourable peace (the very best he could obtain he knew would be only a breathing space, for there was the tremendous question of the Spanish Succession ahead), he cared nothing for the temper of the English parliament or the complaints of the allies, and in the United Provinces he was practically absolute. He had before suggested to Portland that he should write and open negotiations with Boufflers, and had mentioned Hal, midway between Brussels and Mons, as a likely place for an interview. He now, on Portland's words, reverted to this and discussed the details of the scheme that was to give peace to Europe in his weary, low, and strained voice, broken by constant coughs.

The forest of Soignies began to break; the trees became thinner and were scattered to right and left like echelons of soldiers, the whole heaven was clear of cloud, and the sun, just rising above the plains of Brabant, filled the air with a steady colour of pearl-blue.

A little wind touched the trees, then was silent; the constant noise of birds accompanied the tramp of the heavy infantry and the distant, unequal rumble of the gun carriages and baggage waggons.

The King loosened his cloak, cast it over his holster, and looked back at the army following him through the wood.

"If we sign peace this year this will be my last campaign," he remarked.

Portland looked at him quickly.

"The Spanish question—there will be war there—and before long."

"But I have so few years to live," answered the King simply; "for with this peace my work would be done. No, I think I shall never lead an army across the Netherlands again."

They rode clear of the trees now, and saw before them the beautiful valley soft and veiled in the mists of morning.

The King fixed his eyes on the spot where Brussels lay. If Villeroy had outmarched him and was bombarding the capital as he had bombarded it last year, the allies had been checkmated and there would be little hope for the prospects of peace.

Scouts were sent out to ascertain the movements of the enemy; no sign of their fires could be discerned. William thought that his activity had saved Brussels and that there were no fears from Villeroy. He pushed on, and, by ten in the morning, after having ridden fifteen hours, reached the still unmolested ramparts of the capital from which the Spanish flag was yet flying.

He instantly took up his position before the walls and proceeded to strongly entrench himself on the very spot from which Villeroy had dropped his shells into Brussels near a year ago when the allies were before Namur.

It appeared that he had saved the magnificent city by a few hours; before midday the French came up, but, finding the confederate army already so strongly fortified, fell back across Brabant without firing a shot.

The King, as he rode about surveying the encampment, sent for Portland.

The Earl came, and the two men looked at each other steadily; the hasty earthworks, the rising canvas, the sights and sounds of the camp were about them, overhead the blazing blue faintly hazed with clouds of heat.

William held out his thin, bare right hand.

"Since I think you are resolute to leave me," he said, "I would have you go to Hal to meet M. de Boufflers." He added with great sweetness, "I put the fate of Europe in your hands, and could put it in none more worthy."

CHAPTER IX
PEACE

The Earl of Sunderland was again as great as he had been when he held James Stewart infatuate in his power, and as well hated throughout the country as then. The King had long consulted him in private, and now he was recognized as principal adviser to the Crown, and carried the gold key that was the symbol of the office of Lord Chamberlain.

He had no rival. Halifax was dead; Leeds a mere shadow; his intrigues had brought about the resignation of Godolphin, who had been implicated in the disclosures of Sir John Fenwick; Shrewsbury, stricken with remorse at his own

treachery and the King's generosity, was but a figure in the background; and the other ministers, even such as Romney, who was William's personal friend, had little influence; Portland's power was not what it had been, and his rival, M. van Keppel, largely owed his fortunes to Sunderiand. The Lord Chamberlain was supreme in this year 1697, the year of the peace framed by Portland and Boufflers in the orchard at Huy and signed by the Congress at the King's palace of Ryswick.

This peace was an honourable close to an honourable conflict. Louis recognised William as King of England, and granted most of the terms desired by the allies, not one of whom complained that they had been forgotten or slighted by the King in the framing of the articles. The delay of Spain and the Emperor to sign, despite William's entreaties, had resulted in the fall of Barcelona and Louis' consequent rise of terms, the principal of which was the retention of Strassburg—a severe blow to Austria. But, on the whole, the peace was favourable to the coalition, and in England and Holland at least was received with unbounded rejoicing. William's return from the Continent was the signal for a display of loyalty as enthusiastic as that which had greeted the exiled Charles in '66.

William, to whose diplomacy the peace was owing, as the war had been owing to his indomitable energy, was at the very zenith of his reputation at home and abroad. He avoided the pageants, processions, triumphal arches, and general laudations, both from a natural modesty and a cynical perception of their hollowness, which was but too well justified, for the first act of the Parliament was to inflict cruel mortification on him by disbanding, at the instance of the Tory agitator, Robert Harley, the army which had done such magnificent service. Sunderland's utmost arts could only retain ten thousand men, including the King's beloved Dutch Guards.

This action was, to William, the worst of policy, besides a personal slight that he could not but feel that he had ill deserved. The peace was to him but an armed truce before the inevitable struggle for the Spanish possessions, and the part that he was to play in that struggle was considerably weakened by the disbanding of the troops which made England, save for her Navy, powerless again in Europe.

The English Parliament, profoundly ignorant of continental affairs, and not in the least understanding the spacious policy of the King, thought only of the power a standing army put in the hands of the Crown, and were not to be moved from their resolve.

William, driven back, as he had so often been, on his own innate statesmanship, endeavoured to accomplish by wit what he was now powerless to accomplish by arms, and secretly framed with Louis the Partition Treaty, by which the vast dominions of the imbecile and dying King of Spain were to be divided between Louis' grandson Phillippe d'Anjou, and William's candidate, the infant

son of the Elector of Bavaria, who derived his claim through his dead mother, Maria Antonia.

The King had disdained to consult the English ministers until he had completed this treaty, and then only curtly demanded the necessary signatures; from the nation it was a profound secret.

Sunderland disapproved of this daring policy of the King's. He thought that many of the domestic troubles of the reign might have been avoided if William had been less resolute to keep foreign affairs entirely in his own hands, but the King's well-founded distrust of the levity, treachery, and ignorance of the English, and their personal malice towards him as a foreigner, could not be moved by the most specious of Sunderland's arguments. William refused to put any faith in the crowds who shouted after his coach, in the ringing and the toasts, in the bales of loyal addresses that were laid daily at his feet. He knew perfectly well that at bottom he was neither understood nor liked, and that all this rejoicing was not for the King, but because a peace, pleasing to English pride, had been signed; because bank stock had risen from sixty to ninety, paper money to par, the guinea from eighteen shillings to twenty-one; because the new milled coins were in every hand and an era of prosperity was following the crisis of '96.

Sunderland watched all these things with some misgiving. Under all his honours and greatness was a lurking uneasiness. He began to lose his courage at being so hated; hints of impeachment had risen in the House more than once; he could scarcely show his face abroad without a burst of popular fury. In the opinion of the people he should not have been intrusted with one of the highest offices under the Crown, but have been starving in exile, or dead, long since in the Tower, as his colleague under James—Lord Jefferies. The ministers, too, could ill disguise their dislike of him. He had befriended the Whigs, and they owed him a cold allegiance, but he had no real supporter save the King, whose will alone kept him where he was; and he had more enemies than he could count, including Portland, who hated him exceedingly.

When the King had created Joost van Keppel Earl of Albemarle, Portland had offered to resign his post and retire, and only by the intercession of M. de Vaudemont and the passionate entreaties of his one flatterer, the King, had he been induced to stay another year, which was employed in the gorgeous embassy to France from which he had just returned, to find Sunderland all-powerful and Albemarle in full possession of the King's confidence.

Sunderland saw that his temper was strained to the utmost, and that affairs in the King's household must soon reach a crisis. Although he used Albemarle as a balance against a man who hated him, Sunderland had no ill-will towards Portland, and wished to spare the King the agony he knew he would feel on the earl's retirement. He would have wished Shrewsbury to stay too—the King liked

the young duke—but here, as in Portland's case, Sunderland felt matters had gone too far.

He was waiting now, in the King's gallery at Kensington, to intercept and argue with Shrewsbury, whom he knew was about to have an interview with William, and with the object, he suspected, of insisting on his often refused resignation.

He came at last, after his time and slowly, with a languid carriage and an unsteady step that expressed great wretchedness. Sunderland moved out of the embrasure of the window; Shrewsbury paused; and the two noblemen, alike only in birth and country, so totally different in character, intellect, and aim, yet both in the same service, faced one another.

Shrewsbury looked ill, miserable, even slightly dishevelled, his dark clothes were careless and plain, the beauty that had once made him famous as "The King of Hearts" was scarcely to be traced in his strained features, though he was not yet past his first youth. In contrast, Sunderland, though worn and frail, looked less than his years, and was habited very fashionably and gorgeously in black tissue of gold with diamond buttons, his peruke was frizzled and powdered, and he wore a bow of black velvet beneath his chin; his handsome, delicate features wore that expression of watchful, smiling repose which was so seldom from his face that it had come to be one with it, as the faint chiselling on an alabaster bust.

Shrewsbury showed some agitated emotion as the Lord Chamberlain stepped before him.

"I am due with His Majesty," he said.

"I know," answered the earl; "and I think I guess your business with the King."

Shrewsbury paled and said nothing; a defiant look hardened his eyes.

"You," continued the Lord Chamberlain, "are going, my lord, to force your resignation on His Majesty."

"Well—if I am?" Shrewsbury moistened his lips desperately.

"It is, your Grace, a most ill-advised thing to do."

"I have heard many people say that, my lord," answered the young duke, "and I have allowed myself to be too long persuaded. I cannot and I will not stay at Court."

Sunderland gazed at him steadily out of his long, clear eyes.

"You only give colour to the disclosures of Sir John Fenwick, which every one disbelieved. And no one more strongly than His Majesty."

"I bear the taint—the imputation," muttered Shrewsbury. "I cannot and will not endure it. My position is insupportable."

"Marlborough and Russell are in the same position, and find it easy enough to bear," said Sunderland quietly.

The Duke answered with some pride—

"I am not such as they. They act from their standards—I from mine."

He thought, and might have added, that he was not such as the man to whom he spoke. Sunderland was stained with treacheries, disloyalties, corrupt practices, and shameless false-dealing, the very least of which were more than the one lapse that was wearing Shrewsbury to misery with remorse.

The Earl took another tone.

"Think of the King. You call yourself friend to him; he is as harrassed now as he ever was before the war. He hath not too many men to help him—the Tories grow in strength every day. You have been of great service to His Majesty—the greatest in '88. Will you forsake him now—when he needeth you most?"

Shrewsbury put out a trembling hand.

"I have heard these arguments before. Lady Orkney hath been soliciting me to change my resolution—for the same reason that you bring forth. But I am a broken man; I am ill; I must get to the country; I cannot serve His Majesty——"

So speaking, in rapid, disconnected sentences, he gave a wild glance at the Earl's passive face, the fine lines of which had taken on an almost imperceptible expression of contempt and disgust, and passed on to the King's cabinet, which he entered abruptly.

The King was, as usual, at his desk, which was placed between the tall windows which looked on to the beautiful park, now grey and desolate under the afternoon sky of mid-November.

A great fire burnt on the hearth, and the glancing light from it threw into relief the furnishing of the room, every article of which bore evidence to the exile's wistful love of his own country. On the mantelshelf were the tall yellow, white, and blue vases from Delft; the brass fire-irons were Dutch, as were the painted tiles, the black, heavily polished chairs and tables; the exquisite paintings of peaches, carnations, grapes, and butterflies on the wall; and the elaborate china calendar above the King's desk. William was always consistently loyal to the products of his own land; his full cravat, shirt, and wrist-ruffles were now, as generally, of the fine Frisian lawn embroidery, and the buttons of his black silk coat were of the wonderful filigree gold-work for which the States were famous.

He looked up sharply as Shrewsbury entered, and seemed a little disappointed, as if he had been expecting some one else; but instantly commanded himself, and greeted the Duke affectionately.

Shrewsbury looked at him wretchedly, crossed to the hearth irresolutely, then burst out impetuously—

"Sire—I must resign—I can take your wage no longer——"

The King's full bright eyes swept over him in a quick glance of understanding.

”I have told you,” he said, with a gentleness that had a note of pity in it, ”that I hold you innocent of those scandalous slanders that villain Fenwick flung. I have assured you, my lord, of my affection, of my need and wish for your service.”

Shrewsbury bit his lower lip, and stared blindly into the scarlet heart of the fire.

”My health will not permit me——” he began.

”Ah, tush!” interrupted the King, with a little smile. ”Your health is good enough.”

Compared to his own, it was indeed. Shrewsbury could not, for very shame, argue that plea.

”I think you have another reason, your Grace,” added William, kindly and a little sadly. ”And I am an old enough friend for you to confide in me——”

Still the Duke could not speak, but trembled and looked into the fire.

”You are a man of honour,” said the King. ”I have and do trust you. I shall never forget the services you rendered me, when such services were vital indeed; I believe I do not lack gratitude; I should never—I *could* never—desert a friend.”

He exerted himself to speak with courtesy and animation, and there was real feeling behind his words; gratitude was indeed almost a fault with him. Cold as he appeared to outsiders, nothing could turn him when he had once given his affection; he had often, at the expense of his own interests and popularity, defended and upheld his friends.

Shrewsbury clasped the edge of the chimneypiece and tried to speak, but made only some incoherent sound.

”Let me hear no more of resignation, my lord,” said William.

The Duke turned and looked at him desperately, then suddenly and utterly broke down.

”I am guilty, sire!” he cried. ”I betrayed you, and you know it!”

He fell into the chair beside him, and covered his white face with his quivering hands.

”Your generosity is more than I can endure,” he gasped. ”I have been a villain, and I have a bitter punishment!”

The King rose and looked at his minister. A heavy silence hung in the brilliantly firelit little chamber. The Duke was sobbing wretchedly.

William went slightly pale.

”Fenwick spoke the truth,” cried Shrewsbury; ”I have tampered with St. Germains——”

The King crossed over to the young man, and laid his thin, beautiful hand on the bowed shoulders.

”You are my friend,” he said simply. ”I trust you and wish to keep you with me. Nothing else, my dear lord, is of any matter.”

Shrewsbury's answer came hoarsely.

"It is of great matter to me that I have lost my honour——"

The King answered gently.

"While you say that, my lord Duke, you can have lost nothing——"

Shrewsbury would not speak or look up. William returned to his seat at the desk, and began turning over the papers before him. After a few minutes he said, with his eyes still on his letters—

"I have heard nothing—I know nothing—I trust you to continue in my service, my dear lord——"

The Duke sprang up and stood with his back to the fire.

"I cannot—I am not fit," he said desperately, yet with resolution.

William flashed a glance over his shoulder.

"Will you not serve England, then?" he cried, with a deep note in his voice, and waited for the answer, gazing brilliantly at the haggard young man.

"No—no," muttered Shrewsbury. "I am broken—I am not fit——"

There was a little silence. It was the King who spoke first.

"I can say no more," he said quietly. "You have decided. I trust that you will justify your resolution to yourself."

The Duke came heavily to the desk, laid the seals that were the symbol of his office on the desk, and was turning silently away, when the King held out his hand impulsively.

"My lord," he said, with much warmth and kindness, "even if I should never see you again—I should never forget '88."

Shrewsbury seized the frail hand, kissed it with tears, and went violently from the room.

William gave a little sigh, pushed back his chair, and put his hand to his head, coughing.

He was not long alone. Sunderland entered the little cabinet with his cautious light step and an expression that had a little lost its usual composure.

"The little Duke hath resigned," said the King laconically.

A rare ejaculation of impatience and contempt broke from the Lord Chamberlain. "Every one falleth away!" he exclaimed. "There goeth the last link with the Whigs!"

William gave a short laugh.

"I suppose that you will be the next, my lord?" he said shrewdly.

The Earl went rather pale.

"I will hold office as long as I can, Your Majesty," he answered. "But it is a hard thing to maintain my position in the face of all England. But whether I am in office or no, I shall, sir, always serve you."

The King lifted his dark eyes.

”I believe you will, my lord,” he said simply; ”we are old allies now. Well—we have not either of us much more to do—the people have their peace, and we have our positions, and may grow roses, and build villas, and wait for death.”

CHAPTER X
THE BROKEN FRIENDSHIP

The Earl of Portland, newly returned from his gorgeous embassy to France, sat in his apartments at Kensington reading and re-reading a letter.

It was written in a large and flowing hand, unequal in parts, as if the writer had been greatly agitated. The contents, which the Earl had now almost by heart, were strange and sad.

”KENSINGTON, *April* 1699.

”Since I cannot dispute with you, I will say nothing to you on the subject of your retirement; but I cannot refrain from telling you of my extreme sorrow, which is far deeper than you can ever imagine, and assures me that if you felt even the half you would very quickly change your resolution—which may it please the good God to inspire you to do for your own good and my repose. At least I hope that you will not refuse to keep the key of office, for I am content that it should not oblige you to anything, and, besides, I entreat you to let me see you as often as you can, which would be a great consolation to me in the affliction which you have caused me, which cannot prevent me from loving you ever tenderly.”

It was written in French and signed with the letter ’G,’ which had always been affixed to this long, intimate correspondence which had continued now for thirty-three years—since they had been children—continued through war and peace, trouble, disaster, illness, bereavement, disappointment without cloud or shadow—and this was the end.

William Bentinck had resolved to resign the King’s service.

This was the end—in miserable, trivial jealousy. The friendship that had lasted so long, keen and pure, so devoted, had strained and broken. Portland sat, with this sad appeal in his hand, and knew that it was over.

He did not acknowledge that he was unreasonable; he had served William faithfully and devotedly, both as friend and servant, and he had been greatly rewarded; he was one of the wealthiest subjects in Europe; he had an English earldom, and the Garter that foreign kings envied; he was Gentleman of the Bedchamber, Privy Councillor, Groom of the Stole, and Keeper of the King's Gardens; the King had supported him again and again against the Commons, taken his advice, flattered him by an open display of his friendship, entrusted him with the important embassy to France, enriched his son, and, when the breach began to grow, spared nothing to heal it. Few kings could have ever entreated a subject as William had entreated Bentinck.

But he would not dismiss Albemarle; he listened to Sunderland; and everything was nothing to Portland compared to the fact that he should have to share the King's confidence with this young, untried, light-hearted young man.

When he returned from Paris he had found Albemarle in possession of rooms in the Palace that he considered belonged to him in virtue of one of his offices, and the little incident had confirmed his resolution of quitting the Court. He would be second to no one, least of all to a man whom he considered as the tool of a faction that he loathed and despised.

He was well aware that Albemarle was popular, and that he was not; that he had few supporters in his point of view, and that Albemarle had a great following gained by his universal sweetness, good sense, and humility.

He was well aware, too, that the King had never more needed his friendship than now; for the present session of Parliament had inflicted one cruel humiliation on him, and was about to inflict another.

The King's grants of lands in Ireland had been looked into and revoked—even such as he had given to the noble Ginckel, who had done such service, and Meinhard de Schomberg, son of the soldier who had died for England on the banks of Boyne Water.

William, who had disappointed his enemies by preserving a serene composure when he had been forced to consent to the disbanding of the troops, had scarcely been able to conceal his mortification at this malice on the part of the Tories, and was still further moved by the agitation rising in the Commons to turn all foreign soldiers out of the kingdom, including the famous Dutch Guards and the refugee French Huguenots whom William had long had in his service.

But none of this shook William Bentinck's stern resolution to leave the Court.

He folded the letter, put it into his pocket, glanced at the brass bracket-clock in one corner of the room, and went, for the last time, to accompany the King on his way to the Cabinet meeting at Whitehall, which William had summoned with the desperate intention of urging his ministers to try some expedient with

the Parliament to enable him to keep the Dutch Guards.

Portland descended heavily into the courtyard where the coaches waited.

It was a sunny afternoon, and half the soft-coloured brick of the Palace was in a tender light. Some pigeons were gathered round the clock, which was on the point of striking four.

Monsieur Zulestein was there, Sunderland, Devonshire, and Monsieur Auverquerque. Portland kept apart from all of them, and drew the point of his cane up and down the cobbles; his eyes were fixed on the door which led to the staircase to the King's apartments.

As the clock struck the hour William appeared in this doorway, and paused at the head of the steps and looked round the courtyard with narrowed eyes.

He wore black and a star, his hollow cheeks were flushed—unusual for him—and he was breathing with obvious difficulty.

He saw Portland, and his whole face changed; he smiled, and his eyes widened with an indescribable look.

Portland met that glance, and a quick pang gripped his heart; he remembered days of long ago, in camp and cabinet, a frail young man facing the French outside Utrecht, speaking to the Senate at The Hague, firing the people, encouraging a fainting country, leading the mad charge at St. Nelf, fainting over his work during tedious days and nights....

Portland made a step forward; then he saw, behind the King, the ardent, youthful face of my Lord Albemarle, and he fell back.

William slowly descended the steps. The lackeys opened the coach door, and the gentleman came round.

The King looked to Portland, who still stood apart.

"Will you accompany me, my lord?" he said gently.

The seat in his coach was an honour to which his brother-in-law, Prince George, had aspired in vain. Of late Portland had frequently refused it, and in terms so curt as to excite the horror of those who heard. Now the King was making a last appeal—his brilliant eyes, his moved voice were reminding William Bentinck of his letter and of the long friendship which the 'G' that signed it was a symbol of.

There fell the slightest pause; then Portland answered with a harshness that would have been discourteous to an equal—

"I pray you excuse me. I keep my own company to-day."

At this, which was little less than a public insult, the King flushed a dark red, and those about him knew not where to look.

"My Lord Sunderland," commanded William, "you will accompany us."

He entered the coach, the Lord Chamberlain followed, and Portland, very white but unshaken, mounted his own vehicle.

The Royal coach started. Sunderland said not a word and made not a movement, but sat erect, opposite the King, as they drove out under the early budding trees.

William broke out into a sudden, deep passion.

"Is this the Prince of Orange"—he cried, striking his breast—"who was something in Europe? Is this he, the sport of such as Harley, and insulted by those who loved him once?"

"My lord must be out of his wits," replied Sunderland. "I could have struck him."

"This is too much—this is indeed the end," said the King. "He leaves the Court. By God, I was Nassau once, if I am only King of England now!"

"He must still love Your Majesty——" urged the Lord Chamberlain.

"Love!" echoed William. "Doth love inspire such cruelty?" His speech was broken by a violent fit of coughing, which caused the tears to run down his face. Sunderland looked at him in weary despair, and wondered if he could survive his present griefs.

"The Guards," gasped the King, leaning back in his corner—"I must keep those Guards—and the French for whom I promised to provide—Ginckle and Schomberg too——" His hoarse voice became incoherent, he pressed his handkerchief to his lips and stared out at the groves of Kensington Park with hunted eyes.

"We will do all we may, sire," replied Sunderland; but he felt not half the conviction he endeavoured to put into his voice. The party in power now hated the King and hated the Dutch; they were not likely to be merciful in their triumph.

Sunderland could not understand this blind fury against the foreigner. It might have been thought that two nations, both manly and given to a plain religion, both engaged in trade and eager for liberty, could have had much in common, especially when only divided by a strip of narrow sea, and considering that there was no rancour of ancient dispute between them. But at the bottom of each was a fatal difference—a levity, an extravagance, and a narrow arrogance in the English; a prudence, a seriousness, a reserve in the Dutch—that prevented any real friendliness despite the specious complexion of a common cause, and had been gradually fanned by jealousy and party spirit into an obstinate temper, against which the arts of Sunderland were of no avail.

"They must not go," repeated the King in great agitation; "if they do, I go with them—I have told Somers so. I am a foreigner also." He paused; then added, with intense feeling, "I have been too great to become the pensioner of a handful of commoners, the butt of your Harleys and Jack Howes.... I will not take this humiliation."

"Your Majesty must think of the United Provinces," said Sunderland. "If

you were to resign the crown, what of the English alliance?"

This simple question had more weight with William than all the protestations of Lord Somers. He went very pale, and half closed his eyes. In the inevitable, in the nearing contention over the Spanish succession, the dear bought alliance of England would be more necessary than ever to the Republic; but the King's imperious pride, so long controlled, outweighed almost his deep love of his country.

"Let Anne and Maryborough rule you," he said, in a low, passionate voice. "A fool and a villain would maybe please you better. If my soldiers go I cannot in honour stay."

"You must, sire," answered Sunderland. He looked out of the coach window at the white, dusty sweep of Kensington High Street, the cottages with the early flowers before them and the orchard trees covered with their first green. "Your Majesty must remain," repeated Sunderland heavily. "England needeth you."

William gave a cynical laugh.

"England hath had some work out of me—I have laboured for my pay. I am not a young man now, and old for my years. I should wish to die in Holland."

The Earl looked quickly at his master.

"Sire, you must not speak of death."

"I am a dying man," said the King quietly. "A few months—no more, I think."

Sunderland could not gainsay him. In his own heart he felt a curious chill of apathy, as if it was nearing the end; the very sunshine without, falling so placidly on thatch and flowering tree, looked strangely remote. It seemed a long time to Robert Spencer since he had been at leisure to notice the mysterious light of spring. He laughed also, but with a softer note than the King had used.

"Rest is good after labour," he said irrelevantly.

William was also looking out of the window at fields and clouds.

"God alone knoweth if I am damned or saved," he remarked strongly; "but I have done His will as it was revealed to me."

Sunderland glanced at the Calvinist, who in those words had declared his religion. His own creeds were very different; but both men, now at the end, found themselves on much the same level.

Neither spoke again till they reached the courtyard of Whitehall, when the King remarked, with an air of disgust, on the fog of smoke that overhung the city.

As he dismounted from the coach he paused and glanced round the gentlemen; for the first time in his life he ignored my Lord Portland, but, with a delicacy that Sunderland was quick to notice, he equally ignored Albemarle, and passed

into the palace leaning on the arm of Monsieur de Zulestein.

CHAPTER XI
THE KING'S HUMILIATION

Everything had been in vain. Harley pressed his narrow triumph, and the King, after a bitter struggle, consented to let the Dutch soldiers go and to retain the kingship, though he had drawn up a passionate farewell speech to the ungrateful parliament, and shown it to Somers, Sunderland, and Marlborough, now the governor of the little Duke of Gloucester, the heir to the throne.

It was my Lord Chamberlain, fast feeling himself falling before the wolves of faction, who urged the King to sacrifice even this to those great designs to which he had given his life—it was Sunderland who put the needs of Republic before him as he had after the Queen's death; and William had again responded, even out of the depths of agony.

But as the day approached for the departure of those Guards who had been with him since he had first marched out of The Hague against the French, whom he had led again and again in battle, who kept watch every night while he slept, who were devoted to him—not as the King of England, but as William of Orange—as the time drew near for him to say farewell to his friend de Ginckle and Monsieur de Schomberg, as he received daily the petitions of the poor French who had fought for him loyally, and to whom he had promised his protection, his spirit gave way. He made the last sacrifice of his pride, and he who had dealt haughtily with kings wrote a request in his own hand humbly asking the Parliament, as a personal favour to himself, to allow him to retain the Dutch Guards.

He sent the message down to the House by Lord Ranelagh, his Master of the Horse; and now, in his little cabinet at Kensington that had seen so many vigils of toil and sorrow, awaited the answer of the Commons.

Before him lay the draft of the message he had sent—

"His Majesty is pleased to let the House know that the necessary preparations are made for transporting the Guards who came with him into England, unless, out of consideration to him, the House is disposed to find some way of continuing them longer in his service, which His Majesty would take very kindly."

To this humility had William of Orange stooped; beneath this paper was

another, half hidden by it—the farewell speech he had drawn up. His own words flashed up at him in his own impetuous handwriting: ”Feeling that you have so little regard to my advice, that you take no manner of care of your own security, and that you expose yourselves to evident ruin by divesting yourselves of the only means of defence, it would not be just or reasonable that I should be witness of your ruin.”

If he could but go down to the House and cast that at them—leave England, and die peacefully in Holland!

But Sunderland was right; he must endure even this for the sake of the Republic—and surely, even such as Harley could not refuse his personal appeal.

In his agitation and impatience he began pacing up and down the narrow room. He was in wretched health; night after night he could not sleep for grief and mortification; his headaches, his fainting-fits were frequent and terrible; even this gentle walking to and fro soon exhausted him; he sank into the window-seat coughing and holding his side, where his heart was beating with a dragging pain.

Soon inaction became intolerable; he rose, nearly struck the bell to summon M. Zulestein or M. Auverquerque, hesitated, did not, left the cabinet and his own apartments, and came out into the sunny quiet galleries of the palace.

Deep in thought, he walked slowly, with bent head and his hands clasped behind him under the full skirts of his brocade coat, when a sudden sound of voices caused him to look up.

He was in the empty antechamber leading to the King’s gallery, the door of which was half open; it was from behind it that the voices came; one of them, very clear, serene, and beautiful in tone, was speaking as the King paused; the words came very levelly and distinctly—

”He actually asked it as a favour, you say? And of course they will refuse. I should have thought that the little upstart would have known by now that we ain’t to be lorded by foreigners.”

The King stepped back with an instinctive shock, as if he had put his foot on a sword. He knew the voice to be that of the man whom he most despised and loathed—John Churchill, my Lord of Marlborough. Though he was very well aware how he was traduced, lampooned, slandered, and abused behind his back, he had never heard himself referred to in these cool terms of contempt; though he knew these things were said, he had never actually figured what it would be to overhear them.

The blood rushed to his heart and lay there like a weight. He was of a family that had given an Emperor to the West five hundred years ago, and John Churchill was scarce of gentle blood and had climbed on infamy. The King’s right hand crossed over to his sword hilt. The beautiful, insolent voice began again. William instantly pushed open the door and entered the long gallery.

At once silence fell. There were two men, Marlborough and Torrington, near the first window, and a small, weary, anxious-eyed and forlorn-looking child seated near them on a purple stool, making paper boats.

Torrington went scarlet at sight of the King, but Marlborough swept a graceful bow, without the least change in his composure. William looked at him steadily. He could have sent him to the block—not once, but many times, yet he had spared him even the humiliation of a pardon in affecting to ignore his treasons. It was curious to him to look at this man—young, splendid in towering strength and opulent beauty, rich, prosperous, advancing from power to power, infamous, heartless, conscienceless, the man who would be ruling England very shortly now, and in whose hands would rest the completion or the ruin of the task to which he, the King, had given his life.

Torrington, fearful lest William had overheard, made some stumbling remark about their presence. The King seated himself on the window-seat and coughed.

"Ah yes, I forgot that I was to have a visit from His Highness," he said. He looked languidly at the little Duke of Gloucester, Anne's sole child and heir of England. "Come here, sir," he added kindly, "and tell us of your studies."

The child came obediently and stood by the King's knee, gazing at him with very large eyes that shone as if they had a light behind them and were themselves of crystal. He was about ten, remarkably thin and as pale as wax to his very lips, which were compressed with a painful expression of control; the blue veins showed across his high temples, which were shaded by fine, light auburn hair. He wore a very stiff and heavy suit of crimson and gold, a miniature sword, and the garter under his knee. My lord his governor eyed him with the same kind of interest as a trader feels towards some object which, indifferent as it is to himself, he yet hopes to get a good price for.

William took him gently by the shoulders and drew him closer.

"What are they teaching you, eh?" he asked.

The child answered in a precise, toneless voice—

"I am progressing very well, I thank Your Majesty. The dead languages and mathematics, history, and the philosophy and errors of the ancients, the creation of the world and the feudal system; the Gothic Constitution and the beneficiary law are among my next subjects."

"Doth Your Highness remember all these grave matters?" asked the King, with a faint smile.

"I remember very well, sir, when I have not a headache."

"What gives you headache, Highness?"

The little Duke answered gravely—

"If it were not blasphemy, Your Majesty, I should say that it was acquiring

religious knowledge and listening to sermons; but Dr. Burnett says that is a temptation of the devil to induce me to give up my studies."

"Dr. Burnet is making a scholar of you," answered William; "but you are to be a king and a soldier—do not forget that."

A pale colour came into the grave little face.

"Oh, I *want* to be a soldier. I like the riding-school; but things you like are of the devil, Dr. Burnet saith." He looked anxiously at the King, as if hoping for a contradiction.

"I think that is beyond Dr. Burnet to decide," replied William. "And Your Highness must not let any one speak ill of soldiers—there is nothing better for a man to be. As God hath called you to be a king you will best serve Him by being what you feel a king should be—before all, a brave soldier."

The child gave a short sigh.

"I fear it is a very difficult thing to be a king," he said anxiously.

"Perhaps the most difficult thing in the world," answered William. "But Your Highness will reign in happier times."

"Sometimes," continued the little Duke, frowning painfully, "when my head aches and I cannot remember, and Dr. Burnet is angry with me, and I feel so tired, I wish I did not have to be a king—I wish——" He paused.

"What?" asked William; he put his fine hand delicately over the soft hair.

"That I was in heaven," said the child simply.

"Already!" cried the King. He went very white; he had seen a sudden look of Mary in Mary's sister's child.

The Duke nodded.

"But it is wicked to want to go before God calls you," he said, quoting, obviously, his worthy tutor; "and being tired is a temptation of the devil."

"A strong one," answered the King shortly, and then was silent; it seemed terrible to him that this child should begin where he left off, in utter fatigue and despondency. He put his arm round the fragile little body.

"Highness," he said, "I will give you a troop of Horse, and you shall drill them yourself, and you shall have some hours off your studies for it, and I will come and give you lessons in soldiering."

The little Duke's face flushed and changed in a marvellous fashion; he caught the King's free hand and kissed it passionately.

"But Dr. Burnet——" he faltered instantly.

"God doth not only speak through Dr. Burnet," replied William. "Men and horses are more than paper and ink for all that I could ever see; ay, and dogs and swords more than Greek and Latin. The devil is as likely to be between the pages of a book as out in the open, with the animals whom you might love more than men, so faithful they are. My lord!" he called to Marlborough, who had

withdrawn with Torrington, and the magnificent Earl came instantly, with his winning air of deference. ”This child is too much closeted,” said the King. ”Look to it, my lord, that he is more on horseback.”

”Dr. Burnet findeth him an apt pupil, sir,” responded Marlborough, with the serenity and courtesy of indifference. ”And Her Highness is very satisfied.”

”But we are not,” said William quietly. ”It is our intention to give His Highness a troop of Horse.” Then he was silent, for he recalled in a flash that his own beloved companions in arms might be taken from him with no more regard than Marlborough would show in taking wooden toys from this child. Perhaps some such thought was in my lord’s mind; he smiled and let his fine eyes rest mildly on the King.

The little Duke clung to the voluminous ruffles on the King’s breast; his face was scarlet with excitement, and had for the moment lost its premature look of wisdom and anxiety.

”When you next go to Flanders may I come too?” he whispered.

”Why, this is peace, Highness,” smiled William.

”But there will be war again, will there not, sir?”

”God forbid,” answered the King solemnly, ”for we have utterly disarmed ourselves.”

Seeing him so suddenly grave the Duke was silent, and the old look of wonder and question came back into his eyes.

William turned to him again.

”But you will be a great soldier yet; remember me in your first battle, Highness.”

The child fondled the King’s star, and William, with exquisite tenderness, lifted his long smooth curls of auburn hair, and passed them round his fingers.

”Stewart locks,” he murmured, and his voice trembled with the thought of what had been, what might have been, and what could now never be; and another ringlet of this hued hair that lay hidden in his bosom seemed to turn into a dagger that pierced into his heart.

With a great effort he put the child from him and rose.

”Bring His Highness to see us soon, my lord,” he said to Marlborough; ”and see he learns no lackey’s tricks such as the vulgar one of speaking scornfully of your masters in your masters’ houses, which faults, like the vile treasons of mean men, are beneath us to punish; but we would not have the child ape these manners.”

Marlborough’s serene face slightly flushed; he could not, for all his self-command, answer; he bowed very low under the King’s straight gaze.

”You will not forget the soldiers, sir?” cried the little Duke anxiously.

”On my honour, no,” answered William. ”Tell Her Highness I shall soon

wait on her."

He bent and kissed the smooth auburn head and then the upturned, grateful, earnest little face.

My lord left with his charge, and Torrington was soon after dismissed; the King remained in the window-seat. After awhile came my Lords Devonshire, Somers, and Dorset, straight from Westminster, looking very gloomy about this business of the breaking of the troops, and after them Lord Ranelagh, back with his answer from the Commons.

The King came forward a step to meet him, and Ranelagh, felt the blood leave his own face as he saw the look that sprang into William's haggard eyes.

He stood silent, and the other lords glanced at each other furtively.

The King put his hand to his heart.

"Why"—he looked round the distressed faces—"why—they have not—refused?"

Ranelagh dropped to one knee.

"Alas, sire," he began, "'twas from the first hopeless.... Harley hath such a hold——"

William interrupted.

"The Commons have refused our request?"

Ranelagh dared not make words about it.

"Yes, sire," he answered, in a broken voice.

"Ah!" exclaimed William. He turned away from all of them, and walked up and down the long shining floor; after a moment or so he paused beside Dorset, and said, in a very curious tone—

"I must get beyond sea—to—to breathe a little."

None of them ventured to speak, and he moved to the window again; there on the seat was the little crumpled paper boat William of Gloucester had been making out of a scrap of his lesson paper.

The King saw it, and a sudden passion kindled in him; he cast his eyes wildly about him, and exclaimed, with the vehemence of agony—

"Had *I* a son, by God, these Guards should not leave me!"

CHAPTER XII
APATHY

Matthew Prior, secretary to the English Embassy at The Hague, walked in the wonderful gardens at Loo, where the King Stadtholder lived in retreat.

It was early summer of the first year of the new century; there was peace in Europe, prosperity in England and the United Provinces; the work of William of Orange seemed finished indeed; he had dismissed the Parliament that had so insulted and humiliated him without a word, and as soon as it was up had gone into retirement at Loo; he had lost, it seemed, all interest in England, and even in the affairs of Europe. When the death of the infant Electoral Prince had reduced the first Partition Treaty to wastepaper, William had framed another with the Archduke Charles as claimant; the discovery of this had provoked great wrath in England.

Portland, Somers, and Montague had been threatened with impeachment; M. Canales, the Spanish Ambassador, had delivered an impertinent memorial to William, who was now regarded as a powerless cipher in a Parliament-ruled country, and the King had ordered him to be dismissed, and recalled his ambassador from Madrid. As long as Louis kept to the second Partition Treaty—and William could not doubt but that he would keep so grave an undertaking—he cared nothing for what they did in England; he left the government in the hands of a feeble Tory ministry, of which the late Queen's uncle, Lord Rochester, was the head, and, heedless of the complaints and murmurs, remained in retirement at Guelders.

Matthew Prior thought this a sorry end for his hero. This flinging of everything to chance, this cynical indifference, this apathetic calm, seemed a poor conclusion for all that high hope, that serene courage, that long, splendid, patient endeavour, that continuous, glorious action.

He thought sorrowfully that it was now too late. The King was no longer a power in Europe he had been crossed and humbled before all the world, his army had been taken from him, his private grants revoked, his public policy abused, his friends, his ministers, attacked, that Spanish government that in the days of his greatness had humbly offered him the Spanish Netherlands, now dared to insult him; and he was a dying man.

Matthew Prior sighed gloomily as he walked through the formal grounds with their exact parterres, flower-beds, groves, and alleys, their twin fountains and regular groups of trees.

The King had been at dinner when he arrived, and he was waiting his audience with some sinking of the heart; he had not seen William since the peace was proclaimed, three years ago.

It was about three of the clock when he was sent for, and conducted into the large dining-room where the King was still at table.

The Palace, which was one of the most admired in Europe, had been built

by William with lavish magnificence on the site of his favourite hunting-box. Mr. Prior, who had seen Versailles, was impressed by the commodious nobility of the apartments through which he passed.

The dining-room was large, lofty, and cool, though filled with the reflected sunlight that shone in the thick trees that shaded the terrace on to which the four tall windows opened. The walls were hung with pictures of the Princes of the House of Orange, wearing armour and holding the baton of authority; above the deep fireplace was a portrait of Queen Mary in red and ermine, clasped with emeralds and pearls.

The whole room was full of the sense of afternoon sun, but was in shade by reason of the trees without; yet here and there the gold light penetrated and lay in glowing patches on walls, floor, and the white lace cloth that covered the long table that occupied the centre of the chamber.

A number of gentlemen sat round this table on velvet-covered stools; the dishes had been removed; the wineglasses and bottles showed pleasantly on the white linen.

At the head of the table sat the King, in a low arm-chair; beside him was a huge white boar-hound, who rested his long head on his master's knee. William's right arm was round this animal, whom he caressed with affectionate movements of his fingers.

Mr. Prior glanced round the company; he knew them all by sight: there was M. Albemarle, seated nearest to the King, N. Ginckel, my Lord Romney, my Lord Wharton, my Lord Pembroke, M. Zulestein, and M. Auverquerque; they were all laughing at something that featherbrain Lord Romney was relating, and most of them were in hunting attire and leant carelessly on the table.

Matthew Prior looked at the King with searching interest.

William was leaning back in a languid attitude, with his black plumed hat pulled over his eyes; he wore a full coat of velvet brocade in a dark purple, with the huge embroidered elbow-cuffs, now fashionable, and under-sleeves of gold tissue; a great quantity of heavy lace fell over his scarlet waistcoat and at his wrists; the long, thick, dark curls of his peruke half concealed the flash of his star.

This extravagant vesture increased the extreme delicacy of his appearance; he seemed sunk and fainting under the weight of velvet, silk, and lace. His face was pale and hollow, his eyes heavy-lidded and deeply shadowed beneath; constant pain had drawn his mobile mouth into an expression of endurance; his cleft chin, usually carried slightly raised, was sunk on his bosom.

Mr. Prior, as he came up to make his bow, noticed that His Majesty's hands were so thin that the diamond ring that he wore on the third finger of the hand that caressed the dog had slipped round till the rose was towards the palm.

He looked at the young secretary without interest.

”From The Hague?” he asked, and his voice was broken to a whisper with his unceasing asthma.

Mr. Prior went on one knee and handed the letter with which he had been charged. William motioned him to put it on the table by the wineglasses.

”Nothing of importance, eh?” he said.

”I think not, sire; it was merely to ask instructions as to how matters were to be arranged with Monsieur Heinsius with regard to the Spanish questions——”

”Let that wait,” returned the King indifferently. He leant forward and took up his wineglass. ”How do you like our house of Loo, Mr. Prior?”

”I think it worthy of Your Majesty.”

”The gardens are at their finest,” remarked William languidly.

Mr. Prior rose and awaited commands; but the King seemed to quickly forget his presence, and the other gentlemen took no notice of him at all; most of them were far gone in wine, and William was drinking heavily—a new thing, for he had ever been the most moderate of men and intolerant of excess in others.

The King turned his indifferent gaze on Romney and Wharton, who were arguing together.

”Discussing a Republic for England, my lords?” he asked.

”Something of the kind, sir,” said Wharton.

”Well, I will disappoint you yet,” answered William. ”I will bring King James’s son over on you and give you another Stewart king——”

”Why, that is as Your Majesty pleaseth,” replied Wharton impudently.

”Or there is Tom of Pembroke,” continued William; ”there is a good block of wood out of which to chip a king!”

Pembroke raised a heated face at this mention of his name.

”Sir,” he cried, leaning down the table towards the King, ”my Lord Albemarle telleth me that I was insolent last night.”

”So you were—damned insolent,” said the King, in his quiet, tired, unmoved voice.

”I could not have been in my senses,” said Pembroke, in a slightly maudlin tone.

”Oh, silly,” cried the King, ”you were drunk as any trooper; but I never mind what a man saith after his tenth bottle.”

Romney laughed.

”You’ll get more wisdom out of Tom then than when he is sober, sir!”

”And even more folly out of you, Harry,” said His Majesty dryly.

He filled his tall glass, and was raising it when he glanced at Albemarle, who was looking at him steadily.

William laughed.

”Are you thinking of the doctors?” he asked.

”Your Majesty will ever disregard their advice,” replied the young man, in a moved voice.

The King laughed again, not at all pleasantly or graciously.

”Do you think I would forego even the gratification this affordeth”—he touched the bottle contemptuously—”for years of life?”

He drank the wine, using all the while his left hand, for his right arm was round the boar-hound.

”Dr. Ratcliffe aspired to wit this morning,” he said. ”’I would not have you cough for your three kingdoms,’ he remarked. ’Doctor,’ I told him, ”tis the three kingdoms killing me, not the cough.’” He looked round and saw Mr. Prior still standing between the table and the green-gold light of the window.

”Why, Mr. Prior, I play the indifferent host,” he murmured. ”Join us—take your place——”

Romney and Wharton good-humouredly made way for the young poet, who drew another stool modestly to the table. He was surprised at the easy air of familiarity that reigned; the way these men spoke to the King, and the way in which he accepted it. The three older Dutchmen, Mr. Prior noticed, Mr. Zulestein, M. Auverquerque, and my Lord Athlone, were the gravest of the company; he fancied they were there only out of loyalty to the King.

Albemarle began talking to Wharton; they entered into a lively discussion of their separate racing-stables. The King leant back against the crimson cushions of his chair and turned his head so that he looked out of the window.

Mr. Prior gazed at him; he seemed absorbed in thought. Mr. Prior knew that it was the face of a dying man and a heart-broken man; there was not a line of hope, of peace, or pride in that wan countenance; only the serenity of grief, the apathy of utter weariness—a man worn out, done for, awaiting scornfully an inglorious end. And he had done great things; he had been a light to encourage half the world—a name to rally nations.

”He should have died outside Namur,” thought Mr. Prior, and felt the tears smarting against his lids.

He was not deceived by the boon companions, the drinking, the careless talk. He knew that the King cared for none of it, save as a means to hasten death; indeed, the little poet wondered, what had he to live for?—the Queen had gone, then Portland, then the army—his task was finished.

It might have been an hour or more that the King lay back in his chair looking out on the slow-waving, full-leaved boughs, through which the changing sunlight moved; while the noisy talk of the others filled the shadowy spaces of the mellow, lofty room.

Albemarle looked at him often and anxiously, but did not speak.

At last William moved, rousing the sleeping dog.

"I will go into the garden," he said, "before the sun leaves it. I would see those Turkey pears."

Joost van Keppel rose instantly. The King took his arm and got up slowly, coughing with the effort of movement. Mr. Prior was shocked to see that he could not stand alone, but must support himself on Albemarle's young strength.

The others rose, save my Lord Pembroke, who had been asleep this half-hour across the table. The King saw him—an unpleasing spectacle of a stout gentleman with peruke awry and a coarsely red face, breathing heavily through his open mouth, with a wet stain of wine under his cheek and over his cravat.

Mr. Prior expected a burst of anger from the King; but, instead, His Majesty, still holding on to my Lord Albemarle's arm, broke into a long fit of laughter, in which the others joined for no reason at all save their vacant humours.

The poet could not force even a smile. William's unusual and immoderate amusement had a sad sound to him.

Romney and Wharton went to drag Pembroke to his feet, and the King continued laughing.

He was still laughing when an usher and a courier entered the room.

"From England, sire," said the latter, dropping to one knee.

Albemarle sobered instantly. The King ceased laughing and let go my lord's arm, holding himself upright by aid of the table edge.

"Well, what of England?" he muttered. "We have no great interest in England."

"Grave news, Your Majesty," answered the exhausted courier, who had ridden fast from the Hague.

The King took the dispatch and broke it open; it was from Lord Rochester, and contained a few lines written in haste: "His Highness the Duke of Gloucester died suddenly last night of a chill. He desired to be remembered to Your Majesty."

William's hands trembled; the news was serious in so far as it meant that the English succession was now absolutely unsettled. But he was not thinking of that, but of the white, anxious child's face framed in those auburn curls, and the gallant spirit looking out of troubled eyes that had faced the miseries of royalty so bravely.

"My Lord of Gloucester is dead," he said briefly, flinging down the dispatch. "They might have spared their Greek and Latin—poor sweet wretch!" His voice shook a little. "I am glad he had his troop of Horse." Then, during the little pause of consternation that held them all mute, he spoke again: "And I am glad he did

not live to be a King."

CHAPTER XIII
FRANCE CHALLENGES

The sentry on duty at the foot of the great staircase in Hampton Court Palace was nearly asleep.

The palace had been silent for hours; ever since he had relieved the soldier before him he had not heard a sound. It was now nearly three o'clock and beginning to be dark on the huge, gloomy stairway, for it was mid-November and a mist had risen all day from the river.

The sentry yawned and then shivered. Wren's palace was neither very cheerful nor very well warmed. The sentry preferred Whitehall, with the noises of the city without and the coming and going of people to the public galleries.

His Majesty was in residence at Hampton Court, but that made little difference. He lived so quietly and saw so few people, that he might, the sentry thought, as well have stayed at Loo. He only came, as was well known, to open Parliament, and the moment it was up he would be off again to Holland—a poor compliment to England; and now there was not the excuse of the campaigns.

The sentry yawned again and stretched himself, after carefully resting his musketoon against the dark wall; then he looked up the stairs, which were painted with great, scrambling, heathen figures that swarmed up to the roof, where they were lost in the fast gathering shadows. He then walked up and down to keep himself warm, and began to wonder how much longer now before he was changed; it was difficult to keep count of the time because he had lost the last chiming of King Henry's great, painted clock.

Presently the door at the head of the stairs opened, very slowly, but with a distinct sound in the perfect silence.

The sentry caught up his musketoon, thinking that this was one of the officers from the guard-room, and peered cautiously up the stairway.

It was, however, a gentleman in private clothes who was slowly closing the door after him with, it seemed, some difficulty.

The sentry, who knew no one had gone up, wondered who it could be. The stairs were so dark that he could distinguish no more than a slight figure, hatless, and wearing a cloak.

There was a moment's pause and silence, then the new-comer began to descend the wide, shadowed stairs, and the sentry knew who it was—there was only one person who moved about the palace with that slow and painful step, and that was the King.

The man drew back, rigid, to his post. He wondered that the King should be coming down the state staircase unattended and on such an inclement day. As he stood, stiff at the salute, he watched the frail figure crawling with dragging pauses through the dusk.

The King had one hand on the heavy balustrade, and, by grasping this, helped himself along. His head was bowed, and he continually paused to cough or gasp for breath, his hesitating and unequal steps began to rasp in the sentry's brain—he wished some one else would come. It seemed an intolerable length of time as the King made his difficult progress from step to step, and the cloaked figure with the bent, hidden face and the one white hand, so thin that every bone in it showed, moving slowly down the baluster, affected the solitary watcher with a sense almost of terror.

As the King approached this terror increased, as if some ghostly or unearthly presence neared. The hall and stairway rapidly darkened, and the King was but a shadow among shadows when he at length reached the last step and stood grasping the post with his left hand and holding his heart with his right.

He stood there so long and so silently that the sentry's sense of discomfort increased, and he felt a strong desire to turn and fly.

Presently the King moved, with difficult, faltering steps, across the hall, and unlatched the door that gave on the courtyard. As he did so, a full ray of ghastly light fell across the obscurity, and the reason of the sudden darkness was explained, for a thin cloud of snow could be seen against the grey masonry of the palace.

The sentry, who knew that it was dangerous for the King to go out save when the weather was very fair, was startled to see him standing there with the chill wind stirring his cloak and the bitter light of the snow on his face. He stepped forward instinctively, but the King did not hear him.

After a few seconds William passed out, and, acting on an irresistible impulse, the sentry followed him.

The King turned to the left under the covered arcade, and, half resting himself on the inner wall, made weary progress, the snow drifting in through the open arches as far as his feet. He was continually so shaken with his cough that he had to pause, and once the sentry caught a short ejaculation of pain.

They had made almost the circuit of the courtyard and had come to another entrance to the palace, when a second sentry crossed their path. William murmured something, passed him without looking back; the soldier stared after

him, then caught sight of the other following.

”What is this?” he asked, in a quick whisper.

The sentry explained as best he could. Ought the King to go out alone—to go out this weather at all?—why, he could hardly crawl, and his cough hurt one to hear.

The second sentry only knew that they were to stay at their posts; he advised his companion to go back to his lest the captain discovered. As for the King, it was known that he was not good for long anyhow, and it was no business of theirs.

The other soldier was not so sure; he thought my Lord Albemarle ought to know, at least. The King might easily be murdered by the French or the Jacks, and then they would be blamed.

But by now William had disappeared. The soldiers continued arguing in subdued voices, when they were interrupted by the approach of a slim gentleman in furs and velvet, who came with an easy, graceful step along the arcade. Both the men knew him; he was the great Earl of Sunderland.

His quick eye noticed two soldiers in place of one, and that they were talking. His suspicions, that never lay very deep, were instantly roused, he clapt his hand to his sword and paused.

The man who had followed the King found courage to speak.

”My lord, I humbly ask the pardon of your lordship, but His Majesty hath gone out unattended in this foul weather, and I was bold enough to follow His Majesty, thinking of all the late plots.”

”Who are you?” demanded Sunderland.

”May it please your lordship, the sentry at the foot of the state staircase.”

My lord narrowed his eyes on the man.

”You were on guard once outside Whitehall on the day the bishops were acquitted. I spoke to you—’God and the King’—you recall, fellow?”

The soldier was silent with astonishment at the memory of my lord; for himself, he recollected very well, but it was marvellous that a great nobleman should remember such an incident during so many years.

Sunderland gave him no time to speak.

”Where did His Majesty go?”

The soldier humbly pointed out the way, and my lord turned on his heel and went rapidly across the dark, snowy courtyard. He had reached the farther court, untouched by Sir Christopher and still of the fashion of the great cardinal and Harry Tudor, before he saw the King ahead of him, a solitary figure in the grey afternoon.

My lord was instantly beside him.

”Sire, I must speak with you, and at once.”

William looked round calmly.

"Come to the river—I had a mind to see the river."

Sunderland, standing uncovered, answered with energy and decision—

"Sire, if you have no regard for your own health, consider mine. This weather is death."

William took his arm.

"No, Robert, 'tis the fireside that is death to me—to sit and doze like a sick woman in shawls; but come into the great Hall, where we may be undisturbed. Dr. Burnet is in my apartments with a packet of sermons." He paused to cough, and then added: "As for your news—you are going to offer me your resignation."

"That," said Sunderland, "and something else."

"Important?"

"Of the greatest importance."

They turned back across the courtyard, came to a dark archway, and mounted a few steps to the left of it that led straight into the great banqueting hall of Cardinal Wolsey, that, all dismantled and unfurnished as it was, had the air of a vast, deserted church. It was even colder than the outer air, and only an obscure light filtered through the tall stained-glass windows.

But William liked the place for its very sombreness. He led the way to the room beyond, that was hung with old arras and suits of armour, and lit by an oriel window, brilliant, even now, with coats and emblazonments.

A circular seat ran round this window, and in front of it was a table.

Here the King and his minister seated themselves. William leant back against the stained-glass, he was wrapped in his cloak to the chin, and his face was quite colourless; only his eyes fixed Sunderland with a look clear, vivid, and penetrating as ever.

"So even you are leaving me?" he said.

My lord laid his hat on the table and began to pull off his gloves.

"As to that," he answered, "I am assured that there are a hundred and sixty voices in the House for my impeachment. My friends could not face that. And I am too old, sire, and too tired to brave what I once would have braved."

William nodded.

"I would not ask it of you."

Sunderland detached the Lord Chamberlain's gold key from his crimson waistcoat and placed it on the pale oak table.

"I shall be always at your service—just the same," he said; "but I shall never climb again." He smiled. "This is the sum of it, sire—I have no title that I was not born to, I shall have an impaired estate, a detested memory—but I have lived my life, and I have no regrets—none."

"You take with you my deep thanks and gratitude," responded William, with

animation. ”I could never have done what I have done but for you. You will remain my friend, if not my minister. What is your other news?”

”Of far greater importance, sire. Of terrible meaning to Your Majesty.”

William’s eyes flashed. He leant forward.

”To do—with France?” he breathed.

”Yes, sire. The courier from Paris will be here to-night, but the news is all abroad in London now.”

The King’s hollow cheek flushed.

”Tell me,” he commanded.

Sunderland hesitated; it was not easy to tell a great statesman that he had been duped, that his laborious schemes had ended in humiliating failure. It was not easy to tell a dying man that his life-work was all to do again.

”Well?” urged the King imperiously.

”Sire, when the King of Spain died and left his crown to Philippe D’Anjou, Your Majesty was not disturbed?”

”No—because of the Partition Treaties.”

Sunderland looked away, and said in a low voice—

”King Louis hath flung over the Partition Treaties, accepted the will, and published a memorial justifying his action.”

On hearing that he had been so cheated, deceived, betrayed, that, for the first time in his life, he had made a huge political mistake, a blunder, in trusting France, and that France had been all this time laughing at him, that he had been King Louis’ dupe, that he was despised and challenged by the court he had once humbled, William gave a little gasp like a sob, and sat very still.

”Louis,” continued Sunderland, ”defies you, the Republic, and the Emperor, and thinks of nothing but seating his grandson on the throne of Spain.”

William sprang up with the energy of a strong man.

”My God!” he cried, ”I was a fool to trust France. I should have known! I should have known!”

A colour was in his face, his eyes were brilliant, his breast heaved.

”Their effrontery!” he cried again; ”their shameful effrontery! I did not think even they would have broken a solemn treaty made in the face of the whole world! I must confess I am a dupe,” he added proudly, ”but if faith and honour are to be disregarded ’tis easy to cheat any man.”

He sank back on the window-seat and pressed his hand to his forehead.

”They think I am a cipher now—a King without an army—a dying man, but I am he who met them single-handed once and could again.” His voice, broken and weak as it was, expressed an extraordinary enthusiasm and resolution. ”France shall pay for this. I will commit Europe to demand payment, even if I do not live to see it given. Dear Lord! doth Louis think that while I draw a breath a Bourbon

shall rule over Spain, the Netherlands, Milan, Sicily—the Indies?"

He rose and began to walk about; his eyes had flashed no brighter in his youth. He clasped his sword-hilt and half drew it from the scabbard.

"The sword, the sword!" he said, "no way but that. Did I not ever say so? The sword shall bring them to their knees yet; that is the only way to deal with France."

Sunderland sat silent. He was appalled at the thought of the task before the King if he would resist the aggressions of Louis; for the English were in no humour for another war, and had been from the first inclined to the King of Spain's will, not the Partition Treaty—principally, perhaps, because William had framed the latter.

My lord ventured to hint some of this.

"I know," answered William quietly. "The blindness here is incredible—the ignorance, the malice, astonishing. It is the utmost mortification to me that I cannot at once act with the rigour I should, but I have performed some hard tasks before. *I must bring England into this.* And there is the Republic—when did she fail? She is with me always."

He came and sat by Sunderland again, rested his elbows on the table and looked down at the floor, supporting his head on his left hand.

He was face to face with, and had instantly and deliberately undertaken, a task more difficult and tremendous than those he had carried through in '72 and '88. It would be the greatest action of his life—and he had perhaps a few months, at most a few years, to live. There were as many odds against him as there had ever been; so many, so continuous, had been his humiliations and sorrows, that a few moments ago he had not desired to live another day. Now he found himself called to the supreme task of all his laborious career—a task which, if successful, would crown his work with ultimate triumph, however distant, and which, if it failed, would make his whole life useless indeed.

He looked at his wasted hand lying on the table. Every breath was a pain to him. He had scarcely the strength to sit upright. He had to be lifted on to his horse, or into his coach. The doctors gave him dates beyond which he could not live; but his spirit was unchanged since the day that it had inspired him to wrest his country from the conqueror, and it rose now to such a strength of enthusiasm that it actually laughed at the weakness of the poor body that held it...

William of Orange looked up smiling.

"I shall succeed," he said. "I shall succeed."

CHAPTER XIV
THE VANGUARD OF THE WORLD

Again the trees were yellowing in the splendid park at Loo; again the autumn sun fell tenderly over the Palace and the stiff beds of late roses.

William of England and Monsieur Heinsius were standing by the sundial, which was the centre of formal walks and exact parterres.

They were discussing the progress of that endeavour the King had set himself nearly a year ago, when he learnt of Louis's breaking of the Partition Treaty—a year of toil, of patience, of skill, of tact, of sacrifice on the part of William; and it had met with success. Even the English Parliament had not been able to resist his exquisite management. Meanwhile he was quietly forming the Grand Alliance and feeling his way to hurl the inevitable challenge at France.

He was leaning now on a thick polished malacca cane, with a gold and ivory handle, from which swung two heavy crimson tassels, and listening to the Grand Pensionary of Holland, who had been in everything the perfect friend, the perfect servant.

"We can do no more," M. Heinsius was saying; "the States are in readiness. We must wait for England."

"I have been doing that," answered William, "all my life." And he sighed a little, though not with discouragement. There had of late been every sign that the temper of the English was changing. They began to murmur at the Parliament and its constant thwarting of the King. Louis had been, as usual, insolent in his triumph, and British pride began to rise at French insults. William had waited with infinite patience, worked with infinite skill. He still waited and still worked, but with a sure hope of success. Louis, in the infatuation of his success, might easily commit some arrogant action that would inflame the people of England beyond the control of any faction-ridden Commons.

William took out his crystal and gold filigree watch and set it by the sundial. The sky, the trees, the walks and groves, the stately lines of the Palace, were all radiant in an amber-coloured light. The breeze was warm as mid-summer, and lifted the leaves with a pleasant sound. The King raised his eyes to the peaceful autumn beauty, and there was a look in them that was never absent when he was

in his own country—an unconscious expression of the deep passion he felt for his own land, for the very air of it, the very grass and trees and clouds.

Presently he and M. Heinsius went into the house. Some German princes were to dine with the King. All his Dutch friends were there also (save only Portland), and it seemed like the old days again when the Stadtholder would escape for a few days' hunt to Guelders—when he was young and everything was yet to do.

Albemarle, lately invested with the garter, and radiant under his splendours and in the satisfaction of great abilities finding scope, had newly come from London, and during the meal William questioned him on the state of parties there. His answers were satisfactory: the men of Kent had lately sent a stern memorial to the Parliament, requesting them to give up their internal quarrels and aid the King in helping his allies in a fitting manner to resist French dominion in Europe.

The King spoke affectionately and gratefully to Albemarle; then leant back in his chair, and was, after his habit, silent.

His reserve had grown on him more and more of late; he scarcely spoke at all save to his intimates, and saw only those when he was obliged.

Towards the end of the long dinner he roused himself, and, leaning towards M. Heinsius, who sat on his right, said a curious thing.

It was—"Do you think Monsieur de Witt would be proud of his pupil now?"

M. Heinsius could find no answer.

"He was about the age I am now when he met his end," continued William, in a quiet tone. "After all, he had a happier life than I have had ... Monsieur de Witt! How long ago it seemeth!"

He filled his glass, and lifted it as if he drank a silent toast. He looked down the rich table and the splendid guests and up at the portrait of his wife above the dark chimney-piece.

A full ray of dusky sunlight struck across the canvas and gave the painted face something of the glow and bloom of life. The large brown eyes seemed to sparkle, the red lips to move, the white breast to heave. The King was still looking straight at this picture when a messenger entered.

At a glance William saw that his dispatches were from England and France. He set the wine down, and broke open that from London.

M. Heinsius, intently watching him, saw his countenance change, a violent flush rise to his cheek, and his hands tremble.

He pulled his hat over his eyes to cover his emotion, and nervously tore open the French dispatch. M. Heinsius saw that this was in the hand of my Lord Manchester, English Ambassador in Paris.

When the King had read it he was composed again, but even paler than usual. He folded both the letters up and placed them in the huge flap pocket of his coat; then he cast his dimmed but still eagle eye round the table.

"Gentlemen," he said, in a firm voice, "His late Majesty King James is dead at St. Germains."

He pushed back his chair a little and drew a quick breath.

"And King Louis hath shamelessly outraged us by proclaiming his son, the pretended Prince of Wales, as King of Great Britain."

For a moment the company could not grasp the import of this news: it was too monstrous.

"His Christian Majesty hath been foolish before," added William, with grim meaning; "never, I think, as foolish as this."

"By God!" cried M. Heinsius, "there will be no further difficulty with England now!"

The silence broke into murmurs and exclamations. The King took no notice of them; he was thinking of the meaning of this in Europe. Louis had now broken the Treaty of Ryswyck as he had the Partition Treaties. The result would be instant and inevitable war. Even the peace party in the English Commons could not hang back now...

He turned suddenly to Albemarle.

"Send at once to London that M. Poussin is to leave as quickly as M. Barillon did in '88." He laughed shortly. "This will be the second time I have turned a French Ambassador out of London! And Manchester shall be recalled at once." He rose. "Gentlemen," he said, addressing the eager Dutch and Germans, "this meaneth our third war with France; and this time I think it will be conclusive, and we, not France, be left the vanguard of the world."

CHAPTER XV
THE EVE OF WAR

Service was being held in the Royal Chapel at Hampton Court.

There were not many people there: only the King, the officers of his household, and one or two others, including Mr. Prior, new come from The Hague.

William knelt alone in his pew while his chaplain delivered the final and beautiful prayers of the Anglican service; he was not listening to or repeating

these prayers.

The old austerity of his stern religion had become softened with his vaster knowledge and experiences, nor could his firm conception of a wide tolerance maintain the narrow prejudices of sectarian belief; but the old teaching of the faith that had supported his youth and manhood through so much was still strong in him. It suited his nature and his circumstance; it was the creed of his beloved country, and had ever been under the especial protection of his family. The heart of the King was still as Calvinist as it had been when he learnt his grim theology from Pastor Trigland. Though he knelt in English churches and listened to Anglican services, it pleased him to close his eyes and imagine himself back in the bare whitewashed Groote Kerk, an eager grave boy, a silent anxious man, seated in the stiff pew watching the sunlight fall athwart the massive, tall pillars, and drawing stern comfort and noble inspiration from the pastor's thunderous declamation of the theology of Geneva.

This morning the picture came before him with a peculiar and painful vividness. He put his hand over his eyes and thought that he could hear the little stir of Mary's gown beside him, and that if he put out his hand he would touch hers, warm on her Prayer Book ...

Long after the prayers had ceased he continued kneeling, and when he at last rose there was a curious expression on his face.

When he left the Chapel his words were to know if Albemarle had yet arrived.

No, he was told, but my lord might be expected any hour, as the packet from Holland had got in last night.

The King had constantly shown a wistful impatience for the return of Albemarle, when he had parted from him with great pain; but my lord was the only person who knew his exact wishes in the matter of the disposal of the troops in the United Provinces and whom he could entrust with his minute instructions to M. Heinsius.

He now calculated that my lord, even riding all night, could scarcely be there before midday, and he ordered out his horse and said he would ride in the park awhile. It was a day in February, and mild and fine. Of late, too, he had been unexpectedly better in health, and had even hunted and spent hours on horseback.

As the little company left the Chapel, Mr. Prior fell behind to speak with Lord Buckhurst, son of my Lord Dorset, Mr. Prior's former patron.

"Everything is done, is it not?" he asked eagerly.

"Everything," said my young lord, with enthusiasm. "We—and the allies—will take the field this spring. God bless His Majesty!"

"Ay, he did it. I would I could have heard his speech to Parliament. They

say, sir, it hath roused Europe like the trumpet-call to charge——"

"Europe, Mr. Prior, and the Commons of England. I think no nobler words were ever heard in Westminster—he raised them all above themselves—you have read the speech? It is in a dozen different tongues already. England might hold the balance of Europe, he said, if she would exert her ancient vigour and forget her unhappy internal animosities;—and she will, Mr. Prior, she will—thanks to His Majesty."

My Lord Buckhurst was only voicing the general sentiment of enthusiasm and loyalty that William had at last succeeded in rousing.

"Will the King take the campaign this year?" asked Matthew Prior, as they strolled out into the magnificent gardens.

"I do not think so—it is to be my Lord Marlborough."

"A man who was ever detested by the King."

"His Majesty saith he is the greatest general and statesman. Next year he might go himself—there seemeth hope that he might be recovered then."

They passed the yew hedges and fountains, the famous patterned flower-beds, and came out by King Charles's Long Canal, with the resplendent avenue of trees rising up lofty against the pale spring sky and fading into a fair, hazy distance. Coming now into the park where the fresh grass was pushing up through the dead damp leaves of last autumn, and the little groups of slender deer moved delicately through the open sloping glades, they perceived the King riding with two grooms, and holding his hat in his hand to catch the full strength of the faint sun on his face.

He drew up his horse as he saw the two gentlemen, and spoke to them kindly, telling them of the new fine entrance-gates he proposed to make from the Palace grounds to Bushey Park.

He looked more animated and cheerful than he had done for a long while. He was mounted on a splendid young sorrel horse, that he managed with all his old skill.

"A new fellow," he remarked. "The grooms warned me he was spirited, but I could scarcely be afraid of a horse—eh?" He faintly smiled and patted the great creature's glossy neck with his thin, white, ungloved hand.

My Lord Buckhurst looked at the frail figure of the King and the great power of the animal, and indeed wondered that he could manage him. He secretly agreed with the grooms that William was perhaps relying too much on his exquisite horsemanship in mounting such an untried brute.

"I hope," said William, "that I shall find my Lord Albemarle when I return."

He touched up the horse and galloped away out of sight down the long avenue, the grooms after him.

Lord Buckhurst and Mr. Prior lingered a little in the pleasant dim sun and

shade, talking over this great prospect opening out over Europe, and the part the nations of the world would play in the coming struggle—which could not fail to establish for ever the Protestant faith and the liberty of peoples.

Presently the sun clouded over, and they were for returning to the Palace, when the distant sound of hoofs on the grass caused them to look round, thinking this might be the King returning.

What they saw was a riderless horse—a monstrous sorrel horse—galloping across the glade, with the stirrups flying loose.

"The King—his horse!" exclaimed Mr. Prior breathlessly. Lord Buckhurst said nothing; he turned and ran swiftly towards where the animal had come from. Cumbered as he was with sword, full extravagant vesture, and a wide-bottomed peruke, youth brought him easily over the ground, and in a few minutes he came to the spot he made for—a little clearing beyond the great trees of the avenue, with Mr. Prior breathless at his heels.

They saw there what they had been dreading to see: the King lying on the ground, and the two frightened grooms coming up, one dismounted and in an embarrassment to know what to do with his horse, the other giving doleful exclamations and cries for help.

William had raised himself on one elbow, and was holding a handkerchief to his mouth.

Buckhurst and Prior rushed up to him.

"Are you hurt, sire?" cried my lord.

The King removed the handkerchief from his lips; it was scarlet with blood.

"No," he answered. "The brute threw me over that molehill—the first time, my lord, I have been thrown——"

He put his hand to the shoulder on which he had fallen.

"Something broken, I think," he said, in a fainter voice. "They were right—I overestimated my skill—I have not the seat—I—once—had."

My lord endeavoured to raise him, tenderly enough; but at the attempt to move the King's face went of an ashy colour, and he fainted with pain.

"This is the end," murmured my lord. "Take him up, Mr. Prior—dear God, I think this is the end."

With the aid of the two servants, who had now left their horses, they carried him back, by easy degrees, into the Palace, and his own apartments.

Before the doctor could be called he came to his senses and asked for Albemarle. On being told he had arrived, he bid him rest a little before he delivered his news, and, having sent the message, called M. Zulestein to bring him his yet unfinished letter to M. Heinsius.

When it was brought, and quill and ink, he sat up in his great chair with arms, and added painfully these words: "God be praised, all difficulties are over-

come," and his name.

He bid them, in a broken whisper, send off this letter immediately, and fell back again in his chair, very white and frowning.

The alarmed gentlemen were for his seeing the doctor immediately, but he desired to give Albemarle his audience first.

My lord came on the instant, spurred and dusty, and all in a reek from travel.

He entered, with a breathless air of dread, the throne-room, where they had brought the King.

William was seated in a great low chair of red velvet, in front of the blue dais and throne, which bore in silver the Royal arms and the motto of Nassau: "Je Maintaindrai." He still wore his buff hunting-coat with the gold galloon on the wide skirt and the tight doeskin boots with the gilt spurs; his waistcoat was open on his laced shirt, and he held his right hand over his heart.

Lord Albemarle fell on his knees and passionately kissed the King's free hand.

William looked down at him affectionately, and said, between quick little gasps—

"How go matters in Holland?"

"Well, sire, well—everything is in readiness. The States are willing to everything that Your Majesty wisheth; all the preparations are complete for an early campaign—but you, Your Majesty——"

"Tell me of Holland," interrupted William faintly.

Albemarle looked round the company, and hesitated; but at a sign from M. Zulestein obeyed the King, and spoke of the affairs of the Republic, and of their response to the King's call to arms.

William of Orange listened to these words, that told him his lifework was at last accomplished, with such calm that it seemed indifference, or as if he was giving no attention to the matter of the discourse; he never changed his attitude or raised his downcast eyes. It seemed as if even this could not rouse him now.

When Albemarle paused at last and waited, half fearfully, William spoke, but so faintly that my lord, kneeling close as he was, could hardly catch the words.

"I have often wished to die," he murmured; "but now I might wish to live and see this prospect fulfilled; but I draw near my end—the end—the end——"

He said the word three times with so many little sighs, and then fainted,

dropping his hand from his heart.

CHAPTER XVI
GOD AND THE KING

Monsieur Heinsius sat in the little room at the Binnenhof, which had belonged to the Grand Pensionnaries of Holland ever since the Republic had been formed. The furniture and the tall clock in the corner were unchanged since the time of the great John de Witt; the window looked on the Vyverberg, where the swans were floating on the grey, shining, and placid water. It was a day in late March, the year 1702, and the clock of the Groote Kerk had just struck four.

There was a pause in M. Heinsius's strenuous work; for the moment he had nothing to do, and he was very glad of the rare leisure. He had not been in good health for some time, and to-day felt feverish and heavy in his limbs; he winced at the effort of giving instructions to his secretaries, putting up his papers, and going home, so remained, half dozing in his chair, looking at the peaceful surface of the lake, and the still bare trees, and neat brick houses beyond.

Before him, on his old black polished bureau, lay the last letter from the King-Stadtholder, which had given him great pleasure, for alarming reports had been current in The Hague as to the health of His Majesty since his accident at Hampton Court; but in this he said not one word of his illness. The last words were—"I am infinitely concerned to learn that your health is not yet quite established. May God be pleased to grant you a speedy recovery. I am unalterably your good friend, William."

True, the letter was dated the 20th of February, and had been delayed in the coming, and M. Heinsius knew that there might be other news in the packets that were held up in the North Sea by the spring storms; but he believed that the King would not so have written had he been in any danger.

Then an extraordinary thing happened to M. Heinsius. He was leaning back in his chair, weary and exhausted, his head aching with a little fever, and a kind of lassitude on his senses, when something caused him to move his head sharply and look through the open door into the next chamber, where two of his secretaries usually worked.

They were, however, now absent in the Assembly, and M. Heinsius believed himself alone in the two rooms; he was therefore surprised to see a young man

standing in this outer chamber looking out at the Vyverberg and The Hague with an arrested air of intense interest.

M. Heinsius moved round in his chair, but felt no desire to speak. Both the rooms were full of early sunshine and absolutely silent. M. Heinsius observed the stranger with a sensation of vague wonder.

He was very young—little more than a boy—but of a very grave, still carriage; he wore a violet coat, a black sash, a plain sword, and a cravat of Frisian needlework; his clothes were of the fashion of thirty years ago—of the time of John de Witt.

He was very slender and slight; his hair, which was long, thick, and heavily curling, of a deep chestnut colour, fell either side a thin hawk face that M. Heinsius could only imperfectly see; he wore one jewel, and that was the colour of the Garter.

M. Heinsius neither spoke nor moved. Presently the youth turned and came towards the Grand Pensionary's cabinet, walking stiffly, and holding his hat under his arm. M. Heinsius noticed the old-fashioned rosettes on his square-toed shoes.

He came steadily through the sunlight, his glance cast thoughtfully down, and advanced to the desk before which M. Heinsius sat; he moved between the Grand Pensionary and the window, and, leaning forward, put his right hand, which was ringless and beautiful, on the letter of William of Orange.

Then he lifted a pair of eyes of singular power and of a marvellous brilliancy, and flashed a smile at M. Heinsius.

"It is finished," he said, pressing his palm on the letter. "But you will know what to do."

Then he turned and looked out of the window with wistful passion, as of one leaving something he loves, and sighed a little. After a moment he moved away, reluctantly it seemed, and went as he had come, slowly and gravely into the outer chamber, with the sunshine all about him.

M. Heinsius rose now, and turned to follow him; when he reached the door of the anteroom he found it empty....

The Grand Pensionary returned to his seat and hid his face in his hands, telling himself that he had the fever; he tried to think and argue with himself, but it was a useless effort, and he fell presently into a little sleep—or swoon—from which he only roused when he felt a touch on his shoulder, and started up to find the room dark and his secretary standing with a candle and a packet in his hand.

"From England?" murmured M. Heinsius.

"Yes, Mynheer."

The Grand Pensionary took the letter eagerly, hoping to see the writing of the King; but it was addressed in the hand of my Lord Albemarle.

”I have been exhausted unto sleep,” he said. ”Light me the candles—I will read this and go home.”

The candles, in their pale brass sticks, illumined the dark, simple room, the black shining desk, the pale worn face of M. Heinsius, as he opened the letter from England.

It was dated at Kensington House, and this was what the Grand Pensionary read:—

”I have to offer you the saddest and most unwelcome news in the world, which indeed I am not yet able to write plainly.

”My beloved master died yesterday between seven and eight of the evening, which is a loss that we and indeed all Europe cannot be too sensible of.

”He died with the greatest courage and serenity, speaking not at all during his last days, save to thank us graciously for our services. He had no words even for the priests who came about him, which may cause some scandal here.

”I believe his thoughts to have been always on the Republic, from some short ejaculations he made, even while the prayers for the dying were being read. I think that even at the very last his sole concern was the United Provinces.

”He asked for my lord of Portland, who came; but His Majesty was past speech, yet he took my lord’s hand very tenderly, and carried it up to his heart, which was then at the last beat, and died in that attitude, after but a short struggle with his breath.

”They found a locket of the late Queen’s hair fastened by a black ribbon to his sword-arm.

”As he was spared nothing during his life, neither was he at his death; for the doctors say now that he must have been in great and perpetual agony, for his broken collar-bone had pierced his lungs—yet not a single murmur escaped him. His courage was of the most resplendent any man may have—for it was tried in every way.

”I cannot write a fuller account, for I am struck beyond expression by this event. You will, of course, hear of it from others.

”There is very little grief here. They talk of a statue—but when shall we see it raised? They are busy praising Queen Anne, who is the silliest creature I know—a strange people, these English; I am out of humour with them, and you will see me at The Hague very soon.

”I must tell you that the Earl of Sunderland died in retirement at Althorp a few weeks since, despised and neglected by all. But the King remained his friend to the end, and even consulted with him secretly, and he had the faithful attendance of my lady, who is as good a woman as any I ever met, and, God

knows, a lonely one now.

”People here, I think, cannot realize what His Majesty did, nor the task he put through when he was in a manner dying, nor their own ingratitude. But you and I know, and England will come to enjoy the fruits of his work in the years that are coming—and in Holland he can never be forgotten, for he was the greatest of the family of the noblest and most patriotic princes whom the world hath ever seen, and while we are a people we shall revere his name.

”There is much to tell you; but I cannot write of business now, and think to see you soon.—Mynheer the Grand Pensionary, your affectionate friend, ALBEMARLE.”

M. Heinsius put down the letter; he felt scarcely sad; a glorious enthusiasm stirred his heart; the room seemed all too confined for his mood; he went to the window, pushed it open, and looked out at the dark water and the dark houses beyond, where the lights were beginning to show in the windows.

Now there was no doubting the identity of the young man of his vision, nor what the words meant—

”It is finished, but you know what to do.”

The Grand Pensionary knew; he held in his hands all the clues to the vast policies of his late master; he could guide the Republic though the coming great events of war as the King would have wished.

The peaceful evening fell to complete darkness; still Antoon Heinsius stood looking over The Hague. The King hath gone to give his account to God, he thought, and God will say—Not in vain did I make you my captain—not in vain.

THE END

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