DUMAS ALEXANDRE

THE BLACK TULIP

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Содержание

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Chapter 1. A Grateful People

On the 20th of August, 1672, the city of the Hague, always so lively, so neat, and so trim that one might believe every day to be Sunday, with its shady park, with its tall trees, spreading over its Gothic houses, with its canals like large mirrors, in which its steeples and its almost Eastern cupolas are reflected, – the city of the Hague, the capital of the Seven United Provinces, was swelling in all its arteries with a black and red stream of hurried, panting, and restless citizens, who, with their knives in their girdles, muskets on their shoulders, or sticks in their hands, were pushing on to the Buytenhof, a terrible prison, the grated windows of which are still shown, where, on the charge of attempted murder preferred against him by the surgeon Tyckelaer, Cornelius de Witt, the brother of the Grand Pensionary of Holland was confined.

If the history of that time, and especially that of the year in the middle of which our narrative commences, were not indissolubly connected with the two names just mentioned, the few explanatory pages which we are about to add might appear quite supererogatory; but we will, from the very first, apprise the

reader – our old friend, to whom we are wont on the first page to promise amusement, and with whom we always try to keep our word as well as is in our power – that this explanation is as indispensable to the right understanding of our story as to that of the great event itself on which it is based.

Cornelius de Witt, Ruart de Pulten, that is to say, warden of the dikes, ex-burgomaster of Dort, his native town, and member of the Assembly of the States of Holland, was forty-nine years of age, when the Dutch people, tired of the Republic such as John de Witt, the Grand Pensionary of Holland, understood it, at once conceived a most violent affection for the Stadtholderate, which had been abolished for ever in Holland by the "Perpetual Edict" forced by John de Witt upon the United Provinces.

As it rarely happens that public opinion, in its whimsical flights, does not identify a principle with a man, thus the people saw the personification of the Republic in the two stern figures of the brothers De Witt, those Romans of Holland, spurning to pander to the fancies of the mob, and wedding themselves with unbending fidelity to liberty without licentiousness, and prosperity without the waste of superfluity; on the other hand, the Stadtholderate recalled to the popular mind the grave and thoughtful image of the young Prince William of Orange.

The brothers De Witt humoured Louis XIV., whose moral influence was felt by the whole of Europe, and the pressure of whose material power Holland had been made to feel in that marvellous campaign on the Rhine, which, in the space of three

months, had laid the power of the United Provinces prostrate.

Louis XIV. had long been the enemy of the Dutch, who insulted or ridiculed him to their hearts' content, although it must be said that they generally used French refugees for the mouthpiece of their spite. Their national pride held him up as the Mithridates of the Republic. The brothers De Witt, therefore, had to strive against a double difficulty, – against the force of national antipathy, and, besides, against the feeling of weariness which is natural to all vanquished people, when they hope that a new chief will be able to save them from ruin and shame.

This new chief, quite ready to appear on the political stage, and to measure himself against Louis XIV., however gigantic the fortunes of the Grand Monarch loomed in the future, was William, Prince of Orange, son of William II., and grandson, by his mother Henrietta Stuart, of Charles I. of England. We have mentioned him before as the person by whom the people expected to see the office of Stadtholder restored.

This young man was, in 1672, twenty-two years of age. John de Witt, who was his tutor, had brought him up with the view of making him a good citizen. Loving his country better than he did his disciple, the master had, by the Perpetual Edict, extinguished the hope which the young Prince might have entertained of one day becoming Stadtholder. But God laughs at the presumption of man, who wants to raise and prostrate the powers on earth without consulting the King above; and the fickleness and caprice of the Dutch combined with the terror inspired by Louis XIV.,

in repealing the Perpetual Edict, and re-establishing the office of Stadtholder in favour of William of Orange, for whom the hand of Providence had traced out ulterior destinies on the hidden map of the future.

The Grand Pensionary bowed before the will of his fellow citizens; Cornelius de Witt, however, was more obstinate, and notwithstanding all the threats of death from the Orangist rabble, who besieged him in his house at Dort, he stoutly refused to sign the act by which the office of Stadtholder was restored. Moved by the tears and entreaties of his wife, he at last complied, only adding to his signature the two letters V. C. (Vi Coactus), notifying thereby that he only yielded to force.

It was a real miracle that on that day he escaped from the doom intended for him.

John de Witt derived no advantage from his ready compliance with the wishes of his fellow citizens. Only a few days after, an attempt was made to stab him, in which he was severely although not mortally wounded.

This by no means suited the views of the Orange faction. The life of the two brothers being a constant obstacle to their plans, they changed their tactics, and tried to obtain by calumny what they had not been able to effect by the aid of the poniard.

How rarely does it happen that, in the right moment, a great man is found to head the execution of vast and noble designs; and for that reason, when such a providential concurrence of circumstances does occur, history is prompt to record the name

of the chosen one, and to hold him up to the admiration of posterity. But when Satan interposes in human affairs to cast a shadow upon some happy existence, or to overthrow a kingdom, it seldom happens that he does not find at his side some miserable tool, in whose ear he has but to whisper a word to set him at once about his task.

The wretched tool who was at hand to be the agent of this dastardly plot was one Tyckelaer whom we have already mentioned, a surgeon by profession.

He lodged an information against Cornelius de Witt, setting forth that the warden – who, as he had shown by the letters added to his signature, was fuming at the repeal of the Perpetual Edict – had, from hatred against William of Orange, hired an assassin to deliver the new Republic of its new Stadtholder; and he, Tyckelaer was the person thus chosen; but that, horrified at the bare idea of the act which he was asked to perpetrate, he had preferred rather to reveal the crime than to commit it.

This disclosure was, indeed, well calculated to call forth a furious outbreak among the Orange faction. The Attorney General caused, on the 16th of August, 1672, Cornelius de Witt to be arrested; and the noble brother of John de Witt had, like the vilest criminal, to undergo, in one of the apartments of the town prison, the preparatory degrees of torture, by means of which his judges expected to force from him the confession of his alleged plot against William of Orange.

But Cornelius was not only possessed of a great mind, but

also of a great heart. He belonged to that race of martyrs who, indissolubly wedded to their political convictions as their ancestors were to their faith, are able to smile on pain: while being stretched on the rack, he recited with a firm voice, and scanning the lines according to measure, the first strophe of the "Justum ac tenacem" of Horace, and, making no confession, tired not only the strength, but even the fanaticism, of his executioners.

The judges, notwithstanding, acquitted Tyckelaer from every charge; at the same time sentencing Cornelius to be deposed from all his offices and dignities; to pay all the costs of the trial; and to be banished from the soil of the Republic for ever.

This judgment against not only an innocent, but also a great man, was indeed some gratification to the passions of the people, to whose interests Cornelius de Witt had always devoted himself: but, as we shall soon see, it was not enough.

The Athenians, who indeed have left behind them a pretty tolerable reputation for ingratitude, have in this respect to yield precedence to the Dutch. They, at least in the case of Aristides, contented themselves with banishing him.

John de Witt, at the first intimation of the charge brought against his brother, had resigned his office of Grand Pensionary. He too received a noble recompense for his devotedness to the best interests of his country, taking with him into the retirement of private life the hatred of a host of enemies, and the fresh scars of wounds inflicted by assassins, only too often the sole guerdon

obtained by honest people, who are guilty of having worked for their country, and of having forgotten their own private interests.

In the meanwhile William of Orange urged on the course of events by every means in his power, eagerly waiting for the time when the people, by whom he was idolised, should have made of the bodies of the brothers the two steps over which he might ascend to the chair of Stadtholder.

Thus, then, on the 20th of August, 1672, as we have already stated in the beginning of this chapter, the whole town was crowding towards the Buytenhof, to witness the departure of Cornelius de Witt from prison, as he was going to exile; and to see what traces the torture of the rack had left on the noble frame of the man who knew his Horace so well.

Yet all this multitude was not crowding to the Buytenhof with the innocent view of merely feasting their eyes with the spectacle; there were many who went there to play an active part in it, and to take upon themselves an office which they conceived had been badly filled, – that of the executioner.

There were, indeed, others with less hostile intentions. All that they cared for was the spectacle, always so attractive to the mob, whose instinctive pride is flattered by it, – the sight of greatness hurled down into the dust.

"Has not," they would say, "this Cornelius de Witt been locked up and broken by the rack? Shall we not see him pale, streaming with blood, covered with shame?" And was not this a sweet triumph for the burghers of the Hague, whose envy even beat that

of the common rabble; a triumph in which every honest citizen and townsman might be expected to share?

"Moreover," hinted the Orange agitators interspersed through the crowd, whom they hoped to manage like a sharp-edged and at the same time crushing instrument, – "moreover, will there not, from the Buytenhof to the gate of the town, a nice little opportunity present itself to throw some handfuls of dirt, or a few stones, at this Cornelius de Witt, who not only conferred the dignity of Stadtholder on the Prince of Orange merely vi coactus, but who also intended to have him assassinated?"

"Besides which," the fierce enemies of France chimed in, "if the work were done well and bravely at the Hague, Cornelius would certainly not be allowed to go into exile, where he will renew his intrigues with France, and live with his big scoundrel of a brother, John, on the gold of the Marquis de Louvois."

Being in such a temper, people generally will run rather than walk; which was the reason why the inhabitants of the Hague were hurrying so fast towards the Buytenhof.

Honest Tyckelaer, with a heart full of spite and malice, and with no particular plan settled in his mind, was one of the foremost, being paraded about by the Orange party like a hero of probity, national honour, and Christian charity.

This daring miscreant detailed, with all the embellishments and flourishes suggested by his base mind and his ruffianly imagination, the attempts which he pretended Cornelius de Witt had made to corrupt him; the sums of money which were

promised, and all the diabolical stratagems planned beforehand to smooth for him, Tyckelaer, all the difficulties in the path of murder.

And every phase of his speech, eagerly listened to by the populace, called forth enthusiastic cheers for the Prince of Orange, and groans and imprecations of blind fury against the brothers De Witt.

The mob even began to vent its rage by inveighing against the iniquitous judges, who had allowed such a detestable criminal as the villain Cornelius to get off so cheaply.

Some of the agitators whispered, "He will be off, he will escape from us!"

Others replied, "A vessel is waiting for him at Schevening, a French craft. Tyckelaer has seen her."

"Honest Tyckelaer! Hurrah for Tyckelaer!" the mob cried in chorus.

"And let us not forget," a voice exclaimed from the crowd, "that at the same time with Cornelius his brother John, who is as rascally a traitor as himself, will likewise make his escape."

"And the two rogues will in France make merry with our money, with the money for our vessels, our arsenals, and our dockyards, which they have sold to Louis XIV."

"Well, then, don't let us allow them to depart!" advised one of the patriots who had gained the start of the others.

"Forward to the prison, to the prison!" echoed the crowd.

Amid these cries, the citizens ran along faster and faster,

cocking their muskets, brandishing their hatchets, and looking death and defiance in all directions.

No violence, however, had as yet been committed; and the file of horsemen who were guarding the approaches of the Buytenhof remained cool, unmoved, silent, much more threatening in their impassibility than all this crowd of burghers, with their cries, their agitation, and their threats. The men on their horses, indeed, stood like so many statues, under the eye of their chief, Count Tilly, the captain of the mounted troops of the Hague, who had his sword drawn, but held it with its point downwards, in a line with the straps of his stirrup.

This troop, the only defence of the prison, overawed by its firm attitude not only the disorderly riotous mass of the populace, but also the detachment of the burgher guard, which, being placed opposite the Buytenhof to support the soldiers in keeping order, gave to the rioters the example of seditious cries, shouting, —

"Hurrah for Orange! Down with the traitors!"

The presence of Tilly and his horsemen, indeed, exercised a salutary check on these civic warriors; but by degrees they waxed more and more angry by their own shouts, and as they were not able to understand how any one could have courage without showing it by cries, they attributed the silence of the dragoons to pusillanimity, and advanced one step towards the prison, with all the turbulent mob following in their wake.

In this moment, Count Tilly rode forth towards them single-

handed, merely lifting his sword and contracting his brow whilst he addressed them: —

"Well, gentlemen of the burgher guard, what are you advancing for, and what do you wish?"

The burghers shook their muskets, repeating their cry, —

"Hurrah for Orange! Death to the traitors!"

"'Hurrah for Orange!' all well and good!" replied Tilly, "although I certainly am more partial to happy faces than to gloomy ones. 'Death to the traitors!' as much of it as you like, as long as you show your wishes only by cries. But, as to putting them to death in good earnest, I am here to prevent that, and I shall prevent it."

Then, turning round to his men, he gave the word of command, —

"Soldiers, ready!"

The troopers obeyed orders with a precision which immediately caused the burgher guard and the people to fall back, in a degree of confusion which excited the smile of the cavalry officer.

"Holloa!" he exclaimed, with that bantering tone which is peculiar to men of his profession; "be easy, gentlemen, my soldiers will not fire a shot; but, on the other hand, you will not advance by one step towards the prison."

"And do you know, sir, that we have muskets?" roared the commandant of the burghers.

"I must know it, by Jove, you have made them glitter enough

before my eyes; but I beg you to observe also that we on our side have pistols, that the pistol carries admirably to a distance of fifty yards, and that you are only twenty-five from us."

"Death to the traitors!" cried the exasperated burghers.

"Go along with you," growled the officer, "you always cry the same thing over again. It is very tiresome."

With this, he took his post at the head of his troops, whilst the tumult grew fiercer and fiercer about the Buytenhof.

And yet the fuming crowd did not know that, at that very moment when they were tracking the scent of one of their victims, the other, as if hurrying to meet his fate, passed, at a distance of not more than a hundred yards, behind the groups of people and the dragoons, to betake himself to the Buytenhof.

John de Witt, indeed, had alighted from his coach with his servant, and quietly walked across the courtyard of the prison.

Mentioning his name to the turnkey, who however knew him, he said, —

"Good morning, Gryphus; I am coming to take away my brother, who, as you know, is condemned to exile, and to carry him out of the town."

Whereupon the jailer, a sort of bear, trained to lock and unlock the gates of the prison, had greeted him and admitted him into the building, the doors of which were immediately closed again.

Ten yards farther on, John de Witt met a lovely young girl, of about seventeen or eighteen, dressed in the national costume

of the Frisian women, who, with pretty demureness, dropped a curtesy to him. Chucking her under the chin, he said to her, —

"Good morning, my good and fair Rosa; how is my brother?"

"Oh, Mynheer John!" the young girl replied, "I am not afraid of the harm which has been done to him. That's all over now."

"But what is it you are afraid of?"

"I am afraid of the harm which they are going to do to him."

"Oh, yes," said De Witt, "you mean to speak of the people down below, don't you?"

"Do you hear them?"

"They are indeed in a state of great excitement; but when they see us perhaps they will grow calmer, as we have never done them anything but good."

"That's unfortunately no reason, except for the contrary," muttered the girl, as, on an imperative sign from her father, she withdrew.

"Indeed, child, what you say is only too true."

Then, in pursuing his way, he said to himself, —

"Here is a damsel who very likely does not know how to read, who consequently has never read anything, and yet with one word she has just told the whole history of the world."

And with the same calm mien, but more melancholy than he had been on entering the prison, the Grand Pensionary proceeded towards the cell of his brother.

Chapter 2. The Two Brothers

As the fair Rosa, with foreboding doubt, had foretold, so it happened. Whilst John de Witt was climbing the narrow winding stairs which led to the prison of his brother Cornelius, the burghers did their best to have the troop of Tilly, which was in their way, removed.

Seeing this disposition, King Mob, who fully appreciated the laudable intentions of his own beloved militia, shouted most lustily, —

"Hurrah for the burghers!"

As to Count Tilly, who was as prudent as he was firm, he began to parley with the burghers, under the protection of the cocked pistols of his dragoons, explaining to the valiant townsmen, that his order from the States commanded him to guard the prison and its approaches with three companies.

"Wherefore such an order? Why guard the prison?" cried the Orangists.

"Stop," replied the Count, "there you at once ask me more than I can tell you. I was told, 'Guard the prison,' and I guard it. You, gentlemen, who are almost military men yourselves, you are aware that an order must never be gainsaid."

"But this order has been given to you that the traitors may be enabled to leave the town."

"Very possibly, as the traitors are condemned to exile," replied

Tilly.

"But who has given this order?"

"The States, to be sure!"

"The States are traitors."

"I don't know anything about that!"

"And you are a traitor yourself!"

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"Well, as to that, let us understand each other gentlemen. Whom should I betray? The States? Why, I cannot betray them, whilst, being in their pay, I faithfully obey their orders."

As the Count was so indisputably in the right that it was impossible to argue against him, the mob answered only by redoubled clamour and horrible threats, to which the Count opposed the most perfect urbanity.

"Gentlemen," he said, "uncock your muskets, one of them may go off by accident; and if the shot chanced to wound one of my men, we should knock over a couple of hundreds of yours, for which we should, indeed, be very sorry, but you even more so; especially as such a thing is neither contemplated by you nor by myself."

"If you did that," cried the burghers, "we should have a pop at you, too."

"Of course you would; but suppose you killed every man Jack of us, those whom we should have killed would not, for all that, be less dead."

"Then leave the place to us, and you will perform the part of a good citizen."

"First of all," said the Count, "I am not a citizen, but an officer, which is a very different thing; and secondly, I am not a Hollander, but a Frenchman, which is more different still. I have to do with no one but the States, by whom I am paid; let me see an order from them to leave the place to you, and I shall only be too glad to wheel off in an instant, as I am confoundedly bored here."

"Yes, yes!" cried a hundred voices; the din of which was immediately swelled by five hundred others; "let us march to the Town-hall; let us go and see the deputies! Come along! come along!"

"That's it," Tilly muttered between his teeth, as he saw the most violent among the crowd turning away; "go and ask for a meanness at the Town-hall, and you will see whether they will grant it; go, my fine fellows, go!"

The worthy officer relied on the honour of the magistrates, who, on their side, relied on his honour as a soldier.

"I say, Captain," the first lieutenant whispered into the ear of the Count, "I hope the deputies will give these madmen a flat refusal; but, after all, it would do no harm if they would send us some reinforcement."

In the meanwhile, John de Witt, whom we left climbing the stairs, after the conversation with the jailer Gryphus and his daughter Rosa, had reached the door of the cell, where

on a mattress his brother Cornelius was resting, after having undergone the preparatory degrees of the torture. The sentence of banishment having been pronounced, there was no occasion for inflicting the torture extraordinary.

Cornelius was stretched on his couch, with broken wrists and crushed fingers. He had not confessed a crime of which he was not guilty; and now, after three days of agony, he once more breathed freely, on being informed that the judges, from whom he had expected death, were only condemning him to exile.

Endowed with an iron frame and a stout heart, how would he have disappointed his enemies if they could only have seen, in the dark cell of the Buytenhof, his pale face lit up by the smile of the martyr, who forgets the dross of this earth after having obtained a glimpse of the bright glory of heaven.

The warden, indeed, had already recovered his full strength, much more owing to the force of his own strong will than to actual aid; and he was calculating how long the formalities of the law would still detain him in prison.

This was just at the very moment when the mingled shouts of the burgher guard and of the mob were raging against the two brothers, and threatening Captain Tilly, who served as a rampart to them. This noise, which roared outside of the walls of the prison, as the surf dashing against the rocks, now reached the ears of the prisoner.

But, threatening as it sounded, Cornelius appeared not to deem it worth his while to inquire after its cause; nor did he get

up to look out of the narrow grated window, which gave access to the light and to the noise of the world without.

He was so absorbed in his never-ceasing pain that it had almost become a habit with him. He felt with such delight the bonds which connected his immortal being with his perishable frame gradually loosening, that it seemed to him as if his spirit, freed from the trammels of the body, were hovering above it, like the expiring flame which rises from the half-extinguished embers.

He also thought of his brother; and whilst the latter was thus vividly present to his mind the door opened, and John entered, hurrying to the bedside of the prisoner, who stretched out his broken limbs and his hands tied up in bandages towards that glorious brother, whom he now excelled, not in services rendered to the country, but in the hatred which the Dutch bore him.

John tenderly kissed his brother on the forehead, and put his sore hands gently back on the mattress.

"Cornelius, my poor brother, you are suffering great pain, are you not?"

"I am suffering no longer, since I see you, my brother."

"Oh, my poor dear Cornelius! I feel most wretched to see you in such a state."

"And, indeed, I have thought more of you than of myself; and whilst they were torturing me, I never thought of uttering a complaint, except once, to say, 'Poor brother!' But now that you are here, let us forget all. You are coming to take me away, are you not?"

"I am."

"I am quite healed; help me to get up, and you shall see how I can walk."

"You will not have to walk far, as I have my coach near the pond, behind Tilly's dragoons."

"Tilly's dragoons! What are they near the pond for?"

"Well," said the Grand Pensionary with a melancholy smile which was habitual to him, "the gentlemen at the Town-hall expect that the people at the Hague would like to see you depart, and there is some apprehension of a tumult."

"Of a tumult?" replied Cornelius, fixing his eyes on his perplexed brother; "a tumult?"

"Yes, Cornelius."

"Oh! that's what I heard just now," said the prisoner, as if speaking to himself. Then, turning to his brother, he continued, —

"Are there many persons down before the prison."

"Yes, my brother, there are."

"But then, to come here to me – "

"Well?"

"How is it that they have allowed you to pass?"

"You know well that we are not very popular, Cornelius," said the Grand Pensionary, with gloomy bitterness. "I have made my way through all sorts of bystreets and alleys."

"You hid yourself, John?"

"I wished to reach you without loss of time, and I did what

people will do in politics, or on the sea when the wind is against them, – I tacked."

At this moment the noise in the square below was heard to roar with increasing fury. Tilly was parleying with the burghers.

"Well, well," said Cornelius, "you are a very skilful pilot, John; but I doubt whether you will as safely guide your brother out of the Buytenhof in the midst of this gale, and through the raging surf of popular hatred, as you did the fleet of Van Tromp past the shoals of the Scheldt to Antwerp."

"With the help of God, Cornelius, we'll at least try," answered John; "but, first of all, a word with you."

"Speak!"

The shouts began anew.

"Hark, hark!" continued Cornelius, "how angry those people are! Is it against you, or against me?"

"I should say it is against us both, Cornelius. I told you, my dear brother, that the Orange party, while assailing us with their absurd calumnies, have also made it a reproach against us that we have negotiated with France."

"What blockheads they are!"

"But, indeed, they reproach us with it."

"And yet, if these negotiations had been successful, they would have prevented the defeats of Rees, Orsay, Wesel, and Rheinberg; the Rhine would not have been crossed, and Holland might still consider herself invincible in the midst of her marshes and canals."

"All this is quite true, my dear Cornelius, but still more certain it is, that if at this moment our correspondence with the Marquis de Louvois were discovered, skilful pilot as I am, I should not be able to save the frail barque which is to carry the brothers De Witt and their fortunes out of Holland. That correspondence, which might prove to honest people how dearly I love my country, and what sacrifices I have offered to make for its liberty and glory, would be ruin to us if it fell into the hands of the Orange party. I hope you have burned the letters before you left Dort to join me at the Hague."

"My dear brother," Cornelius answered, "your correspondence with M. de Louvois affords ample proof of your having been of late the greatest, most generous, and most able citizen of the Seven United Provinces. I rejoice in the glory of my country; and particularly do I rejoice in your glory, John. I have taken good care not to burn that correspondence."

"Then we are lost, as far as this life is concerned," quietly said the Grand Pensionary, approaching the window.

"No, on the contrary, John, we shall at the same time save our lives and regain our popularity."

"But what have you done with these letters?"

"I have intrusted them to the care of Cornelius van Baerle, my godson, whom you know, and who lives at Dort."

"Poor honest Van Baerle! who knows so much, and yet thinks of nothing but of flowers and of God who made them. You have intrusted him with this fatal secret; it will be his ruin, poor soul!"

"His ruin?"

"Yes, for he will either be strong or he will be weak. If he is strong, he will, when he hears of what has happened to us, boast of our acquaintance; if he is weak, he will be afraid on account of his connection with us: if he is strong, he will betray the secret by his boldness; if he is weak, he will allow it to be forced from him. In either case he is lost, and so are we. Let us, therefore, fly, fly, as long as there is still time."

Cornelius de Witt, raising himself on his couch, and grasping the hand of his brother, who shuddered at the touch of his linen bandages, replied, —

"Do not I know my godson? have not I been enabled to read every thought in Van Baerle's mind, and every sentiment in his heart? You ask whether he is strong or weak. He is neither the one nor the other; but that is not now the question. The principal point is, that he is sure not to divulge the secret, for the very good reason that he does not know it himself."

John turned round in surprise.

"You must know, my dear brother, that I have been trained in the school of that distinguished politician John de Witt; and I repeat to you, that Van Baerle is not aware of the nature and importance of the deposit which I have intrusted to him."

"Quick then," cried John, "as there is still time, let us convey to him directions to burn the parcel."

"Through whom?"

"Through my servant Craeke, who was to have accompanied

us on horseback, and who has entered the prison with me, to assist you downstairs."

"Consider well before having those precious documents burnt, John!"

"I consider, above all things, that the brothers De Witt must necessarily save their lives, to be able to save their character. If we are dead, who will defend us? Who will have fully understood our intentions?"

"You expect, then, that they would kill us if those papers were found?"

John, without answering, pointed with his hand to the square, whence, at that very moment, fierce shouts and savage yells made themselves heard.

"Yes, yes," said Cornelius, "I hear these shouts very plainly, but what is their meaning?"

John opened the window.

"Death to the traitors!" howled the populace.

"Do you hear now, Cornelius?"

"To the traitors! that means us!" said the prisoner, raising his eyes to heaven and shrugging his shoulders.

"Yes, it means us," repeated John.

"Where is Craeke?"

"At the door of your cell, I suppose."

"Let him enter then."

John opened the door; the faithful servant was waiting on the threshold.

"Come in, Craeke, and mind well what my brother will tell you."

"No, John; it will not suffice to send a verbal message; unfortunately, I shall be obliged to write."

"And why that?"

"Because Van Baerle will neither give up the parcel nor burn it without a special command to do so."

"But will you be able to write, poor old fellow?" John asked, with a look on the scorched and bruised hands of the unfortunate sufferer.

"If I had pen and ink you would soon see," said Cornelius.

"Here is a pencil, at any rate."

"Have you any paper? for they have left me nothing."

"Here, take this Bible, and tear out the fly-leaf."

"Very well, that will do."

"But your writing will be illegible."

"Just leave me alone for that," said Cornelius. "The executioners have indeed pinched me badly enough, but my hand will not tremble once in tracing the few lines which are requisite."

And really Cornelius took the pencil and began to write, when through the white linen bandages drops of blood oozed out which the pressure of the fingers against the pencil squeezed from the raw flesh.

A cold sweat stood on the brow of the Grand Pensionary.

Cornelius wrote: —

"My dear Godson, —

"Burn the parcel which I have intrusted to you. Burn it without looking at it, and without opening it, so that its contents may for ever remain unknown to yourself. Secrets of this description are death to those with whom they are deposited. Burn it, and you will have saved John and Cornelius de Witt.

"Farewell, and love me.

"Cornelius de Witt

"August 20th, 1672."

John, with tears in his eyes, wiped off a drop of the noble blood which had soiled the leaf, and, after having handed the despatch to Craeke with a last direction, returned to Cornelius, who seemed overcome by intense pain, and near fainting.

"Now," said he, "when honest Craeke sounds his coxswain's whistle, it will be a signal of his being clear of the crowd, and of his having reached the other side of the pond. And then it will be our turn to depart."

Five minutes had not elapsed, before a long and shrill whistle was heard through the din and noise of the square of the Buytenhof.

John gratefully raised his eyes to heaven.

"And now," said he, "let us off, Cornelius."

Chapter 3. The Pupil of John de Witt

Whilst the clamour of the crowd in the square of Buytenhof, which grew more and more menacing against the two brothers, determined John de Witt to hasten the departure of his brother Cornelius, a deputation of burghers had gone to the Town-hall to demand the withdrawal of Tilly's horse.

It was not far from the Buytenhof to Hoogstraet (High Street); and a stranger, who since the beginning of this scene had watched all its incidents with intense interest, was seen to wend his way with, or rather in the wake of, the others towards the Town-hall, to hear as soon as possible the current news of the hour.

This stranger was a very young man, of scarcely twenty-two or three, with nothing about him that bespoke any great energy. He evidently had his good reasons for not making himself known, as he hid his face in a handkerchief of fine Frisian linen, with which he incessantly wiped his brow or his burning lips.

With an eye keen as that of a bird of prey, – with a long aquiline nose, a finely cut mouth, which he generally kept open, or rather which was gaping like the edges of a wound, – this man would have presented to Lavater, if Lavater had lived at that time, a subject for physiognomical observations which at the first blush would not have been very favourable to the person in question.

"What difference is there between the figure of the conqueror and that of the pirate?" said the ancients. The difference only

between the eagle and the vulture, – serenity or restlessness.

And indeed the sallow physiognomy, the thin and sickly body, and the prowling ways of the stranger, were the very type of a suspecting master, or an unquiet thief; and a police officer would certainly have decided in favour of the latter supposition, on account of the great care which the mysterious person evidently took to hide himself.

He was plainly dressed, and apparently unarmed; his arm was lean but wiry, and his hands dry, but of an aristocratic whiteness and delicacy, and he leaned on the shoulder of an officer, who, with his hand on his sword, had watched the scenes in the Buytenhof with eager curiosity, very natural in a military man, until his companion drew him away with him.

On arriving at the square of the Hoogstraet, the man with the sallow face pushed the other behind an open shutter, from which corner he himself began to survey the balcony of the Town-hall.

At the savage yells of the mob, the window of the Town-hall opened, and a man came forth to address the people.

"Who is that on the balcony?" asked the young man, glancing at the orator.

"It is the Deputy Bowelt," replied the officer.

"What sort of a man is he? Do you know anything of him?"

"An honest man; at least I believe so, Monseigneur."

Hearing this character given of Bowelt, the young man showed signs of such a strange disappointment and evident dissatisfaction that the officer could not but remark it, and therefore added, —

"At least people say so, Monseigneur. I cannot say anything about it myself, as I have no personal acquaintance with Mynheer Bowelt."

"An honest man," repeated he who was addressed as Monseigneur; "do you mean to say that he is an honest man (brave homme), or a brave one (homme brave)?"

"Ah, Monseigneur must excuse me; I would not presume to draw such a fine distinction in the case of a man whom, I assure your Highness once more, I know only by sight."

"If this Bowelt is an honest man," his Highness continued, "he will give to the demand of these furibund petitioners a very queer reception."

The nervous quiver of his hand, which moved on the shoulder of his companion as the fingers of a player on the keys of a harpsichord, betrayed his burning impatience, so ill concealed at certain times, and particularly at that moment, under the icy and sombre expression of his face.

The chief of the deputation of the burghers was then heard addressing an interpellation to Mynheer Bowelt, whom he requested to let them know where the other deputies, his colleagues, were.

"Gentlemen," Bowelt repeated for the second time, "I assure you that in this moment I am here alone with Mynheer d'Asperen, and I cannot take any resolution on my own responsibility."

"The order! we want the order!" cried several thousand voices.

Mynheer Bowelt wished to speak, but his words were not heard, and he was only seen moving his arms in all sorts of gestures, which plainly showed that he felt his position to be desperate. When, at last, he saw that he could not make himself heard, he turned round towards the open window, and called Mynheer d'Asperen.

The latter gentleman now made his appearance on the balcony, where he was saluted with shouts even more energetic than those with which, ten minutes before, his colleague had been received.

This did not prevent him from undertaking the difficult task of haranguing the mob; but the mob preferred forcing the guard of the States – which, however, offered no resistance to the sovereign people – to listening to the speech of Mynheer d'Asperen.

"Now, then," the young man coolly remarked, whilst the crowd was rushing into the principal gate of the Town-hall, "it seems the question will be discussed indoors, Captain. Come along, and let us hear the debate."

"Oh, Monseigneur! Monseigneur! take care!"

"Of what?"

"Among these deputies there are many who have had dealings with you, and it would be sufficient, that one of them should recognize your Highness."

"Yes, that I might be charged with having been the instigator of all this work, indeed, you are right," said the young man,

blushing for a moment from regret of having betrayed so much eagerness. “From this place we shall see them return with or without the order for the withdrawal of the dragoons, then we may judge which is greater, Mynheer Bowelt’s honesty or his courage.”

“But,” replied the officer, looking with astonishment at the personage whom he addressed as Monseigneur, “but your Highness surely does not suppose for one instant that the deputies will order Tilly’s horse to quit their post?”

“Why not?” the young man quietly retorted.

“Because doing so would simply be signing the death warrant of Cornelius and John de Witt.”

“We shall see,” his Highness replied, with the most perfect coolness; “God alone knows what is going on within the hearts of men.”

The officer looked askance at the impassible figure of his companion, and grew pale: he was an honest man as well as a brave one.

From the spot where they stood, his Highness and his attendant heard the tumult and the heavy tramp of the crowd on the staircase of the Town-hall. The noise thereupon sounded through the windows of the hall, on the balcony of which Mynheers Bowelt and D’Asperen had presented themselves. These two gentlemen had retired into the building, very likely from fear of being forced over the balustrade by the pressure of the crowd.

After this, fluctuating shadows in tumultuous confusion were seen flitting to and fro across the windows: the council hall was filling.

Suddenly the noise subsided, and as suddenly again it rose with redoubled intensity, and at last reached such a pitch that the old building shook to the very roof.

At length, the living stream poured back through the galleries and stairs to the arched gateway, from which it was seen issuing like waters from a spout.

At the head of the first group, man was flying rather than running, his face hideously distorted with satanic glee: this man was the surgeon Tyckelaer.

"We have it! we have it!" he cried, brandishing a paper in the air.

"They have got the order!" muttered the officer in amazement.

"Well, then," his Highness quietly remarked, "now I know what to believe with regard to Mynheer Bowelt's honesty and courage: he has neither the one nor the other."

Then, looking with a steady glance after the crowd which was rushing along before him, he continued, —

"Let us now go to the Buytenhof, Captain; I expect we shall see a very strange sight there."

The officer bowed, and, without making any reply, followed in the steps of his master.

There was an immense crowd in the square and about the neighbourhood of the prison. But the dragoons of Tilly still kept

it in check with the same success and with the same firmness.

It was not long before the Count heard the increasing din of the approaching multitude, the first ranks of which rushed on with the rapidity of a cataract.

At the same time he observed the paper, which was waving above the surface of clenched fists and glittering arms.

"Halloa!" he said, rising in his stirrups, and touching his lieutenant with the knob of his sword; "I really believe those rascals have got the order."

"Dastardly ruffians they are," cried the lieutenant.

It was indeed the order, which the burgher guard received with a roar of triumph. They immediately sallied forth, with lowered arms and fierce shouts, to meet Count Tilly's dragoons.

But the Count was not the man to allow them to approach within an inconvenient distance.

"Stop!" he cried, "stop, and keep off from my horse, or I shall give the word of command to advance."

"Here is the order!" a hundred insolent voices answered at once.

He took it in amazement, cast a rapid glance on it, and said quite aloud, —

"Those who have signed this order are the real murderers of Cornelius de Witt. I would rather have my two hands cut off than have written one single letter of this infamous order."

And, pushing back with the hilt of his sword the man who wanted to take it from him, he added, —

"Wait a minute, papers like this are of importance, and are to be kept."

Saying this, he folded up the document, and carefully put it in the pocket of his coat.

Then, turning round towards his troop, he gave the word of command, —

"Tilly's dragoons, wheel to the right!"

After this, he added, in an undertone, yet loud enough for his words to be not altogether lost to those about him, —

"And now, ye butchers, do your work!"

A savage yell, in which all the keen hatred and ferocious triumph rife in the precincts of the prison simultaneously burst forth, and accompanied the departure of the dragoons, as they were quietly filing off.

The Count tarried behind, facing to the last the infuriated populace, which advanced at the same rate as the Count retired.

John de Witt, therefore, had by no means exaggerated the danger, when, assisting his brother in getting up, he hurried his departure. Cornelius, leaning on the arm of the Ex-Grand Pensionary, descended the stairs which led to the courtyard. At the bottom of the staircase he found little Rosa, trembling all over.

"Oh, Mynheer John," she said, "what a misfortune!"

"What is it, my child?" asked De Witt.

"They say that they are gone to the Town-hall to fetch the order for Tilly's horse to withdraw."

"You do not say so!" replied John. "Indeed, my dear child, if the dragoons are off, we shall be in a very sad plight."

"I have some advice to give you," Rosa said, trembling even more violently than before.

"Well, let us hear what you have to say, my child. Why should not God speak by your mouth?"

"Now, then, Mynheer John, if I were in your place, I should not go out through the main street."

"And why so, as the dragoons of Tilly are still at their post?"

"Yes, but their order, as long as it is not revoked, enjoins them to stop before the prison."

"Undoubtedly."

"Have you got an order for them to accompany you out of the town?"

"We have not?"

"Well, then, in the very moment when you have passed the ranks of the dragoons you will fall into the hands of the people."

"But the burgher guard?"

"Alas! the burgher guard are the most enraged of all."

"What are we to do, then?"

"If I were in your place, Mynheer John," the young girl timidly continued, "I should leave by the postern, which leads into a deserted by-lane, whilst all the people are waiting in the High Street to see you come out by the principal entrance. From there I should try to reach the gate by which you intend to leave the town."

"But my brother is not able to walk," said John.

"I shall try," Cornelius said, with an expression of most sublime fortitude.

"But have you not got your carriage?" asked the girl.

"The carriage is down near the great entrance."

"Not so," she replied. "I considered your coachman to be a faithful man, and I told him to wait for you at the postern."

The two brothers looked first at each other, and then at Rosa, with a glance full of the most tender gratitude.

"The question is now," said the Grand Pensionary, "whether Gryphus will open this door for us."

"Indeed, he will do no such thing," said Rosa.

"Well, and how then?"

"I have foreseen his refusal, and just now whilst he was talking from the window of the porter's lodge with a dragoon, I took away the key from his bunch."

"And you have got it?"

"Here it is, Mynheer John."

"My child," said Cornelius, "I have nothing to give you in exchange for the service you are rendering us but the Bible which you will find in my room; it is the last gift of an honest man; I hope it will bring you good luck."

"I thank you, Master Cornelius, it shall never leave me," replied Rosa.

And then, with a sigh, she said to herself, "What a pity that I do not know how to read!"

"The shouts and cries are growing louder and louder," said John; "there is not a moment to be lost."

"Come along, gentlemen," said the girl, who now led the two brothers through an inner lobby to the back of the prison. Guided by her, they descended a staircase of about a dozen steps; traversed a small courtyard, which was surrounded by castellated walls; and, the arched door having been opened for them by Rosa, they emerged into a lonely street where their carriage was ready to receive them.

"Quick, quick, my masters! do you hear them?" cried the coachman, in a deadly fright.

Yet, after having made Cornelius get into the carriage first, the Grand Pensionary turned round towards the girl, to whom he said, —

"Good-bye, my child! words could never express our gratitude. God will reward you for having saved the lives of two men."

Rosa took the hand which John de Witt proffered to her, and kissed it with every show of respect.

"Go! for Heaven's sake, go!" she said; "it seems they are going to force the gate."

John de Witt hastily got in, sat himself down by the side of his brother, and, fastening the apron of the carriage, called out to the coachman, —

"To the Tol-Hek!"

The Tol-Hek was the iron gate leading to the harbor of

Schevening, in which a small vessel was waiting for the two brothers.

The carriage drove off with the fugitives at the full speed of a pair of spirited Flemish horses. Rosa followed them with her eyes until they turned the corner of the street, upon which, closing the door after her, she went back and threw the key into a cell.

The noise which had made Rosa suppose that the people were forcing the prison door was indeed owing to the mob battering against it after the square had been left by the military.

Solid as the gate was, and although Gryphus, to do him justice, stoutly enough refused to open it, yet evidently it could not resist much longer, and the jailer, growing very pale, put to himself the question whether it would not be better to open the door than to allow it to be forced, when he felt some one gently pulling his coat.

He turned round and saw Rosa.

"Do you hear these madmen?" he said.

"I hear them so well, my father, that in your place – "

"You would open the door?"

"No, I should allow it to be forced."

"But they will kill me!"

"Yes, if they see you."

"How shall they not see me?"

"Hide yourself."

"Where?"

"In the secret dungeon."

"But you, my child?"

"I shall get into it with you. We shall lock the door and when they have left the prison, we shall again come forth from our hiding place."

"Zounds, you are right, there!" cried Gryphus; "it's surprising how much sense there is in such a little head!"

Then, as the gate began to give way amidst the triumphant shouts of the mob, she opened a little trap-door, and said, —

"Come along, come along, father."

"But our prisoners?"

"God will watch over them, and I shall watch over you."

Gryphus followed his daughter, and the trap-door closed over his head, just as the broken gate gave admittance to the populace.

The dungeon where Rosa had induced her father to hide himself, and where for the present we must leave the two, offered to them a perfectly safe retreat, being known only to those in power, who used to place there important prisoners of state, to guard against a rescue or a revolt.

The people rushed into the prison, with the cry —

"Death to the traitors! To the gallows with Cornelius de Witt! Death! death!"

Chapter 4. The Murderers

The young man with his hat slouched over his eyes, still leaning on the arm of the officer, and still wiping from time to time his brow with his handkerchief, was watching in a corner of the Buytenhof, in the shade of the overhanging weather-board of a closed shop, the doings of the infuriated mob, a spectacle which seemed to draw near its catastrophe.

"Indeed," said he to the officer, "indeed, I think you were right, Van Deken; the order which the deputies have signed is truly the death-warrant of Master Cornelius. Do you hear these people? They certainly bear a sad grudge to the two De Witts."

"In truth," replied the officer, "I never heard such shouts."

"They seem to have found out the cell of the man. Look, look! is not that the window of the cell where Cornelius was locked up?"

A man had seized with both hands and was shaking the iron bars of the window in the room which Cornelius had left only ten minutes before.

"Halloa, halloa!" the man called out, "he is gone."

"How is that? gone?" asked those of the mob who had not been able to get into the prison, crowded as it was with the mass of intruders.

"Gone, gone," repeated the man in a rage, "the bird has flown."

"What does this man say?" asked his Highness, growing quite pale.

"Oh, Monseigneur, he says a thing which would be very fortunate if it should turn out true!"

"Certainly it would be fortunate if it were true," said the young man; "unfortunately it cannot be true."

"However, look!" said the officer.

And indeed, some more faces, furious and contorted with rage, showed themselves at the windows, crying, —

"Escaped, gone, they have helped them off!"

And the people in the street repeated, with fearful imprecations, —

"Escaped gone! After them, and catch them!"

"Monseigneur, it seems that Mynheer Cornelius has really escaped," said the officer.

"Yes, from prison, perhaps, but not from the town; you will see, Van Deken, that the poor fellow will find the gate closed against him which he hoped to find open."

"Has an order been given to close the town gates, Monseigneur?"

"No, – at least I do not think so; who could have given such an order?"

"Indeed, but what makes your Highness suppose?"

"There are fatalities," Monseigneur replied, in an offhand manner; "and the greatest men have sometimes fallen victims to such fatalities."

At these words the officer felt his blood run cold, as somehow or other he was convinced that the prisoner was lost.

At this moment the roar of the multitude broke forth like thunder, for it was now quite certain that Cornelius de Witt was no longer in the prison.

Cornelius and John, after driving along the pond, had taken the main street, which leads to the Tol-Hek, giving directions to the coachman to slacken his pace, in order not to excite any suspicion.

But when, on having proceeded half-way down that street, the man felt that he had left the prison and death behind, and before him there was life and liberty, he neglected every precaution, and set his horses off at a gallop.

All at once he stopped.

"What is the matter?" asked John, putting his head out of the coach window.

"Oh, my masters!" cried the coachman, "it is – "

Terror choked the voice of the honest fellow.

"Well, say what you have to say!" urged the Grand Pensionary.

"The gate is closed, that's what it is."

"How is this? It is not usual to close the gate by day."

"Just look!"

John de Witt leaned out of the window, and indeed saw that the man was right.

"Never mind, but drive on," said John, "I have with me the order for the commutation of the punishment, the gate-keeper

will let us through."

The carriage moved along, but it was evident that the driver was no longer urging his horses with the same degree of confidence.

Moreover, as John de Witt put his head out of the carriage window, he was seen and recognized by a brewer, who, being behind his companions, was just shutting his door in all haste to join them at the Buytenhof. He uttered a cry of surprise, and ran after two other men before him, whom he overtook about a hundred yards farther on, and told them what he had seen. The three men then stopped, looking after the carriage, being however not yet quite sure as to whom it contained.

The carriage in the meanwhile arrived at the Tol-Hek.

"Open!" cried the coachman.

"Open!" echoed the gatekeeper, from the threshold of his lodge; "it's all very well to say 'Open!' but what am I to do it with?"

"With the key, to be sure!" said the coachman.

"With the key! Oh, yes! but if you have not got it?"

"How is that? Have not you got the key?" asked the coachman.

"No, I haven't."

"What has become of it?"

"Well, they have taken it from me."

"Who?"

"Some one, I dare say, who had a mind that no one should leave the town."

"My good man," said the Grand Pensionary, putting out his head from the window, and risking all for gaining all; "my good man, it is for me, John de Witt, and for my brother Cornelius, who I am taking away into exile."

"Oh, Mynheer de Witt! I am indeed very much grieved," said the gatekeeper, rushing towards the carriage; "but, upon my sacred word, the key has been taken from me."

"When?"

"This morning."

"By whom?"

"By a pale and thin young man, of about twenty-two."

"And wherefore did you give it up to him?"

"Because he showed me an order, signed and sealed."

"By whom?"

"By the gentlemen of the Town-hall."

"Well, then," said Cornelius calmly, "our doom seems to be fixed."

"Do you know whether the same precaution has been taken at the other gates?"

"I do not."

"Now then," said John to the coachman, "God commands man to do all that is in his power to preserve his life; go, and drive to another gate."

And whilst the servant was turning round the vehicle the Grand Pensionary said to the gatekeeper, —

"Take our thanks for your good intentions; the will must count

for the deed; you had the will to save us, and that, in the eyes of the Lord, is as if you had succeeded in doing so."

"Alas!" said the gatekeeper, "do you see down there?"

"Drive at a gallop through that group," John called out to the coachman, "and take the street on the left; it is our only chance."

The group which John alluded to had, for its nucleus, those three men whom we left looking after the carriage, and who, in the meanwhile, had been joined by seven or eight others.

These new-comers evidently meant mischief with regard to the carriage.

When they saw the horses galloping down upon them, they placed themselves across the street, brandishing cudgels in their hands, and calling out, —

"Stop! stop!"

The coachman, on his side, lashed his horses into increased speed, until the coach and the men encountered.

The brothers De Witt, enclosed within the body of the carriage, were not able to see anything; but they felt a severe shock, occasioned by the rearing of the horses. The whole vehicle for a moment shook and stopped; but immediately after, passing over something round and elastic, which seemed to be the body of a prostrate man set off again amidst a volley of the fiercest oaths.

"Alas!" said Cornelius, "I am afraid we have hurt some one."

"Gallop! gallop!" called John.

But, notwithstanding this order, the coachman suddenly came

to a stop.

"Now, then, what is the matter again?" asked John.

"Look there!" said the coachman.

John looked. The whole mass of the populace from the Buytenhof appeared at the extremity of the street along which the carriage was to proceed, and its stream moved roaring and rapid, as if lashed on by a hurricane.

"Stop and get off," said John to the coachman; "it is useless to go any farther; we are lost!"

"Here they are! here they are!" five hundred voices were crying at the same time.

"Yes, here they are, the traitors, the murderers, the assassins!" answered the men who were running after the carriage to the people who were coming to meet it. The former carried in their arms the bruised body of one of their companions, who, trying to seize the reins of the horses, had been trodden down by them.

This was the object over which the two brothers had felt their carriage pass.

The coachman stopped, but, however strongly his master urged him, he refused to get off and save himself.

In an instant the carriage was hemmed in between those who followed and those who met it. It rose above the mass of moving heads like a floating island. But in another instant it came to a dead stop. A blacksmith had with his hammer struck down one of the horses, which fell in the traces.

At this moment, the shutter of a window opened, and

disclosed the sallow face and the dark eyes of the young man, who with intense interest watched the scene which was preparing. Behind him appeared the head of the officer, almost as pale as himself.

"Good heavens, Monseigneur, what is going on there?" whispered the officer.

"Something very terrible, to a certainty," replied the other.

"Don't you see, Monseigneur, they are dragging the Grand Pensionary from the carriage, they strike him, they tear him to pieces!"

"Indeed, these people must certainly be prompted by a most violent indignation," said the young man, with the same impassible tone which he had preserved all along.

"And here is Cornelius, whom they now likewise drag out of the carriage, – Cornelius, who is already quite broken and mangled by the torture. Only look, look!"

"Indeed, it is Cornelius, and no mistake."

The officer uttered a feeble cry, and turned his head away; the brother of the Grand Pensionary, before having set foot on the ground, whilst still on the bottom step of the carriage, was struck down with an iron bar which broke his skull. He rose once more, but immediately fell again.

Some fellows then seized him by the feet, and dragged him into the crowd, into the middle of which one might have followed his bloody track, and he was soon closed in among the savage yells of malignant exultation.

The young man – a thing which would have been thought impossible – grew even paler than before, and his eyes were for a moment veiled behind the lids.

The officer saw this sign of compassion, and, wishing to avail himself of this softened tone of his feelings, continued, —

"Come, come, Monseigneur, for here they are also going to murder the Grand Pensionary."

But the young man had already opened his eyes again.

"To be sure," he said. "These people are really implacable. It does no one good to offend them."

"Monseigneur," said the officer, "may not one save this poor man, who has been your Highness's instructor? If there be any means, name it, and if I should perish in the attempt – "

William of Orange – for he it was – knit his brows in a very forbidding manner, restrained the glance of gloomy malice which glistened in his half-closed eye, and answered, —

"Captain Van Deken, I request you to go and look after my troops, that they may be armed for any emergency."

"But am I to leave your Highness here, alone, in the presence of all these murderers?"

"Go, and don't you trouble yourself about me more than I do myself," the Prince gruffly replied.

The officer started off with a speed which was much less owing to his sense of military obedience than to his pleasure at being relieved from the necessity of witnessing the shocking spectacle of the murder of the other brother.

He had scarcely left the room, when John – who, with an almost superhuman effort, had reached the stone steps of a house nearly opposite that where his former pupil concealed himself – began to stagger under the blows which were inflicted on him from all sides, calling out, —

"My brother! where is my brother?"

One of the ruffians knocked off his hat with a blow of his clenched fist.

Another showed to him his bloody hands; for this fellow had ripped open Cornelius and disembowelled him, and was now hastening to the spot in order not to lose the opportunity of serving the Grand Pensionary in the same manner, whilst they were dragging the dead body of Cornelius to the gibbet.

John uttered a cry of agony and grief, and put one of his hands before his eyes.

"Oh, you close your eyes, do you?" said one of the soldiers of the burgher guard; "well, I shall open them for you."

And saying this he stabbed him with his pike in the face, and the blood spurted forth.

"My brother!" cried John de Witt, trying to see through the stream of blood which blinded him, what had become of Cornelius; "my brother, my brother!"

"Go and run after him!" bellowed another murderer, putting his musket to his temples and pulling the trigger.

But the gun did not go off.

The fellow then turned his musket round, and, taking it by the

barrel with both hands, struck John de Witt down with the butt-end. John staggered and fell down at his feet, but, raising himself with a last effort, he once more called out, —

"My brother!" with a voice so full of anguish that the young man opposite closed the shutter.

There remained little more to see; a third murderer fired a pistol with the muzzle to his face; and this time the shot took effect, blowing out his brains. John de Witt fell to rise no more.

On this, every one of the miscreants, emboldened by his fall, wanted to fire his gun at him, or strike him with blows of the sledge-hammer, or stab him with a knife or swords, every one wanted to draw a drop of blood from the fallen hero, and tear off a shred from his garments.

And after having mangled, and torn, and completely stripped the two brothers, the mob dragged their naked and bloody bodies to an extemporised gibbet, where amateur executioners hung them up by the feet.

Then came the most dastardly scoundrels of all, who not having dared to strike the living flesh, cut the dead in pieces, and then went about the town selling small slices of the bodies of John and Cornelius at ten sous a piece.

We cannot take upon ourselves to say whether, through the almost imperceptible chink of the shutter, the young man witnessed the conclusion of this shocking scene; but at the very moment when they were hanging the two martyrs on the gibbet he passed through the terrible mob, which was too much

absorbed in the task, so grateful to its taste, to take any notice of him, and thus he reached unobserved the Tol-Hek, which was still closed.

"Ah! sir," said the gatekeeper, "do you bring me the key?"

"Yes, my man, here it is."

"It is most unfortunate that you did not bring me that key only one quarter of an hour sooner," said the gatekeeper, with a sigh.

"And why that?" asked the other.

"Because I might have opened the gate to Mynheers de Witt; whereas, finding the gate locked, they were obliged to retrace their steps."

"Gate! gate!" cried a voice which seemed to be that of a man in a hurry.

The Prince, turning round, observed Captain Van Deken.

"Is that you, Captain?" he said. "You are not yet out of the Hague? This is executing my orders very slowly."

"Monseigneur," replied the Captain, "this is the third gate at which I have presented myself; the other two were closed."

"Well, this good man will open this one for you; do it, my friend."

The last words were addressed to the gatekeeper, who stood quite thunderstruck on hearing Captain Van Deken addressing by the title of Monseigneur this pale young man, to whom he himself had spoken in such a familiar way.

As it were to make up for his fault, he hastened to open the gate, which swung creaking on its hinges.

"Will Monseigneur avail himself of my horse?" asked the Captain.

"I thank you, Captain, I shall use my own steed, which is waiting for me close at hand."

And taking from his pocket a golden whistle, such as was generally used at that time for summoning the servants, he sounded it with a shrill and prolonged call, on which an equerry on horseback speedily made his appearance, leading another horse by the bridle.

William, without touching the stirrup, vaulted into the saddle of the led horse, and, setting his spurs into its flanks, started off for the Leyden road. Having reached it, he turned round and beckoned to the Captain who was far behind, to ride by his side.

"Do you know," he then said, without stopping, "that those rascals have killed John de Witt as well as his brother?"

"Alas! Monseigneur," the Captain answered sadly, "I should like it much better if these two difficulties were still in your Highness's way of becoming de facto Stadtholder of Holland."

"Certainly, it would have been better," said William, "if what did happen had not happened. But it cannot be helped now, and we have had nothing to do with it. Let us push on, Captain, that we may arrive at Alphen before the message which the States-General are sure to send to me to the camp."

The Captain bowed, allowed the Prince to ride ahead and, for the remainder of the journey, kept at the same respectful distance as he had done before his Highness called him to his side.

“How I should wish,” William of Orange malignantly muttered to himself, with a dark frown and setting the spurs to his horse, “to see the figure which Louis will cut when he is apprised of the manner in which his dear friends De Witt have been served! Oh thou Sun! thou Sun! as truly as I am called William the Silent, thou Sun, thou hadst best look to thy rays!”

And the young Prince, the relentless rival of the Great King, sped away upon his fiery steed, – this future Stadtholder who had been but the day before very uncertainly established in his new power, but for whom the burghers of the Hague had built a staircase with the bodies of John and Cornelius, two princes as noble as he in the eyes of God and man.

Chapter 5. The Tulip-fancier and his Neighbour

Whilst the burghers of the Hague were tearing in pieces the bodies of John and Cornelius de Witt, and whilst William of Orange, after having made sure that his two antagonists were really dead, was galloping over the Leyden road, followed by Captain van Deken, whom he found a little too compassionate to honour him any longer with his confidence, Craeke, the faithful servant, mounted on a good horse, and little suspecting what terrible events had taken place since his departure, proceeded along the high road lined with trees, until he was clear of the town and the neighbouring villages.

Being once safe, he left his horse at a livery stable in order not to arouse suspicion, and tranquilly continued his journey on the canal-boats, which conveyed him by easy stages to Dort, pursuing their way under skilful guidance by the shortest possible routes through the windings of the river, which held in its watery embrace so many enchanting little islands, edged with willows and rushes, and abounding in luxurious vegetation, whereon flocks of fat sheep browsed in peaceful sleepiness. Craeke from afar off recognised Dort, the smiling city, at the foot of a hill dotted with windmills. He saw the fine red brick houses, mortared in white lines, standing on the edge of the

water, and their balconies, open towards the river, decked out with silk tapestry embroidered with gold flowers, the wonderful manufacture of India and China; and near these brilliant stuffs, large lines set to catch the voracious eels, which are attracted towards the houses by the garbage thrown every day from the kitchens into the river.

Craeke, standing on the deck of the boat, saw, across the moving sails of the windmills, on the slope of the hill, the red and pink house which was the goal of his errand. The outlines of its roof were merging in the yellow foliage of a curtain of poplar trees, the whole habitation having for background a dark grove of gigantic elms. The mansion was situated in such a way that the sun, falling on it as into a funnel, dried up, warmed, and fertilised the mist which the verdant screen could not prevent the river wind from carrying there every morning and evening.

Having disembarked unobserved amid the usual bustle of the city, Craeke at once directed his steps towards the house which we have just described, and which – white, trim, and tidy, even more cleanly scoured and more carefully waxed in the hidden corners than in the places which were exposed to view – enclosed a truly happy mortal.

This happy mortal, rara avis, was Dr. van Baerle, the godson of Cornelius de Witt. He had inhabited the same house ever since his childhood, for it was the house in which his father and grandfather, old established princely merchants of the princely city of Dort, were born.

Mynheer van Baerle the father had amassed in the Indian trade three or four hundred thousand guilders, which Mynheer van Baerle the son, at the death of his dear and worthy parents, found still quite new, although one set of them bore the date of coinage of 1640, and the other that of 1610, a fact which proved that they were guilders of Van Baerle the father and of Van Baerle the grandfather; but we will inform the reader at once that these three or four hundred thousand guilders were only the pocket money, or sort of purse, for Cornelius van Baerle, the hero of this story, as his landed property in the province yielded him an income of about ten thousand guilders a year.

When the worthy citizen, the father of Cornelius, passed from time into eternity, three months after having buried his wife, who seemed to have departed first to smooth for him the path of death as she had smoothed for him the path of life, he said to his son, as he embraced him for the last time, —

"Eat, drink, and spend your money, if you wish to know what life really is, for as to toiling from morn to evening on a wooden stool, or a leathern chair, in a counting-house or a laboratory, that certainly is not living. Your time to die will also come; and if you are not then so fortunate as to have a son, you will let my name grow extinct, and my guilders, which no one has ever fingered but my father, myself, and the coiner, will have the surprise of passing to an unknown master. And least of all, imitate the example of your godfather, Cornelius de Witt, who has plunged into politics, the most ungrateful of all careers, and who will

certainly come to an untimely end."

Having given utterance to this paternal advice, the worthy Mynheer van Baerle died, to the intense grief of his son Cornelius, who cared very little for the guilders, and very much for his father.

Cornelius then remained alone in his large house. In vain his godfather offered to him a place in the public service, – in vain did he try to give him a taste for glory, – although Cornelius, to gratify his godfather, did embark with De Ruyter upon "The Seven Provinces," the flagship of a fleet of one hundred and thirty-nine sail, with which the famous admiral set out to contend singlehanded against the combined forces of France and England. When, guided by the pilot Leger, he had come within musket-shot of the "Prince," with the Duke of York (the English king's brother) aboard, upon which De Ruyter, his mentor, made so sharp and well directed an attack that the Duke, perceiving that his vessel would soon have to strike, made the best of his way aboard the "Saint Michael"; when he had seen the "Saint Michael," riddled and shattered by the Dutch broadside, drift out of the line; when he had witnessed the sinking of the "Earl of Sandwich," and the death by fire or drowning of four hundred sailors; when he realized that the result of all this destruction – after twenty ships had been blown to pieces, three thousand men killed and five thousand injured – was that nothing was decided, that both sides claimed the victory, that the fighting would soon begin again, and that just one more name,

that of Southwold Bay, had been added to the list of battles; when he had estimated how much time is lost simply in shutting his eyes and ears by a man who likes to use his reflective powers even while his fellow creatures are cannonading one another; – Cornelius bade farewell to De Ruyter, to the Ruart de Pulten, and to glory, kissed the knees of the Grand Pensionary, for whom he entertained the deepest veneration, and retired to his house at Dort, rich in his well-earned repose, his twenty-eight years, an iron constitution and keen perceptions, and his capital of more than four hundred thousands of florins and income of ten thousand, convinced that a man is always endowed by Heaven with too much for his own happiness, and just enough to make him miserable.

Consequently, and to indulge his own idea of happiness, Cornelius began to be interested in the study of plants and insects, collected and classified the Flora of all the Dutch islands, arranged the whole entomology of the province, on which he wrote a treatise, with plates drawn by his own hands; and at last, being at a loss what to do with his time, and especially with his money, which went on accumulating at a most alarming rate, he took it into his head to select for himself, from all the follies of his country and of his age, one of the most elegant and expensive, – he became a tulip-fancier.

It was the time when the Dutch and the Portuguese, rivalling each other in this branch of horticulture, had begun to worship that flower, and to make more of a cult of it than ever naturalists

dared to make of the human race for fear of arousing the jealousy of God.

Soon people from Dort to Mons began to talk of Mynheer van Baerle's tulips; and his beds, pits, drying-rooms, and drawers of bulbs were visited, as the galleries and libraries of Alexandria were by illustrious Roman travellers.

Van Baerle began by expending his yearly revenue in laying the groundwork of his collection, after which he broke in upon his new guilders to bring it to perfection. His exertions, indeed, were crowned with a most magnificent result: he produced three new tulips, which he called the "Jane," after his mother; the "Van Baerle," after his father; and the "Cornelius," after his godfather; the other names have escaped us, but the fanciers will be sure to find them in the catalogues of the times.

In the beginning of the year 1672, Cornelius de Witt came to Dort for three months, to live at his old family mansion; for not only was he born in that city, but his family had been resident there for centuries.

Cornelius, at that period, as William of Orange said, began to enjoy the most perfect unpopularity. To his fellow citizens, the good burghers of Dort, however, he did not appear in the light of a criminal who deserved to be hung. It is true, they did not particularly like his somewhat austere republicanism, but they were proud of his valour; and when he made his entrance into their town, the cup of honour was offered to him, readily enough, in the name of the city.

After having thanked his fellow citizens, Cornelius proceeded to his old paternal house, and gave directions for some repairs, which he wished to have executed before the arrival of his wife and children; and thence he wended his way to the house of his godson, who perhaps was the only person in Dort as yet unacquainted with the presence of Cornelius in the town.

In the same degree as Cornelius de Witt had excited the hatred of the people by sowing those evil seeds which are called political passions, Van Baerle had gained the affections of his fellow citizens by completely shunning the pursuit of politics, absorbed as he was in the peaceful pursuit of cultivating tulips.

Van Baerle was truly beloved by his servants and labourers; nor had he any conception that there was in this world a man who wished ill to another.

And yet it must be said, to the disgrace of mankind, that Cornelius van Baerle, without being aware of the fact, had a much more ferocious, fierce, and implacable enemy than the Grand Pensionary and his brother had among the Orange party, who were most hostile to the devoted brothers, who had never been sundered by the least misunderstanding during their lives, and by their mutual devotion in the face of death made sure the existence of their brotherly affection beyond the grave.

At the time when Cornelius van Baerle began to devote himself to tulip-growing, expending on this hobby his yearly revenue and the guilders of his father, there was at Dort, living next door to him, a citizen of the name of Isaac Boxtel who

from the age when he was able to think for himself had indulged the same fancy, and who was in ecstasies at the mere mention of the word "tulban," which (as we are assured by the "Floriste Francaise," the most highly considered authority in matters relating to this flower) is the first word in the Cingalese tongue which was ever used to designate that masterpiece of floriculture which is now called the tulip.

Boxtel had not the good fortune of being rich, like Van Baerle. He had therefore, with great care and patience, and by dint of strenuous exertions, laid out near his house at Dort a garden fit for the culture of his cherished flower; he had mixed the soil according to the most approved prescriptions, and given to his hotbeds just as much heat and fresh air as the strictest rules of horticulture exact.

Isaac knew the temperature of his frames to the twentieth part of a degree. He knew the strength of the current of air, and tempered it so as to adapt it to the wave of the stems of his flowers. His productions also began to meet with the favour of the public. They were beautiful, nay, distinguished. Several fanciers had come to see Boxtel's tulips. At last he had even started amongst all the Linnaeuses and Tourneforts a tulip which bore his name, and which, after having travelled all through France, had found its way into Spain, and penetrated as far as Portugal; and the King, Don Alfonso VI. – who, being expelled from Lisbon, had retired to the island of Terceira, where he amused himself, not, like the great Conde, with watering his

carnations, but with growing tulips – had, on seeing the Boxtel tulip, exclaimed, "Not so bad, by any means!"

All at once, Cornelius van Baerle, who, after all his learned pursuits, had been seized with the tulipomania, made some changes in his house at Dort, which, as we have stated, was next door to that of Boxtel. He raised a certain building in his court-yard by a story, which shutting out the sun, took half a degree of warmth from Boxtel's garden, and, on the other hand, added half a degree of cold in winter; not to mention that it cut the wind, and disturbed all the horticultural calculations and arrangements of his neighbour.

After all, this mishap appeared to Boxtel of no great consequence. Van Baerle was but a painter, a sort of fool who tried to reproduce and disfigure on canvas the wonders of nature. The painter, he thought, had raised his studio by a story to get better light, and thus far he had only been in the right. Mynheer van Baerle was a painter, as Mynheer Boxtel was a tulip-grower; he wanted somewhat more sun for his paintings, and he took half a degree from his neighbour's tulips.

The law was for Van Baerle, and Boxtel had to abide by it.

Besides, Isaac had made the discovery that too much sun was injurious to tulips, and that this flower grew quicker, and had a better colouring, with the temperate warmth of morning, than with the powerful heat of the midday sun. He therefore felt almost grateful to Cornelius van Baerle for having given him a screen gratis.

Maybe this was not quite in accordance with the true state of things in general, and of Isaac Boxtel's feelings in particular. It is certainly astonishing what rich comfort great minds, in the midst of momentous catastrophes, will derive from the consolations of philosophy.

But alas! What was the agony of the unfortunate Boxtel on seeing the windows of the new story set out with bulbs and seedlings of tulips for the border, and tulips in pots; in short, with everything pertaining to the pursuits of a tulip-monomaniac!

There were bundles of labels, cupboards, and drawers with compartments, and wire guards for the cupboards, to allow free access to the air whilst keeping out slugs, mice, dormice, and rats, all of them very curious fanciers of tulips at two thousand francs a bulb.

Boxtel was quite amazed when he saw all this apparatus, but he was not as yet aware of the full extent of his misfortune. Van Baerle was known to be fond of everything that pleases the eye. He studied Nature in all her aspects for the benefit of his paintings, which were as minutely finished as those of Gerard Dow, his master, and of Mieris, his friend. Was it not possible, that, having to paint the interior of a tulip-grower's, he had collected in his new studio all the accessories of decoration?

Yet, although thus consoling himself with illusory suppositions, Boxtel was not able to resist the burning curiosity which was devouring him. In the evening, therefore, he placed a ladder against the partition wall between their gardens, and,

looking into that of his neighbour Van Baerle, he convinced himself that the soil of a large square bed, which had formerly been occupied by different plants, was removed, and the ground disposed in beds of loam mixed with river mud (a combination which is particularly favourable to the tulip), and the whole surrounded by a border of turf to keep the soil in its place. Besides this, sufficient shade to temper the noonday heat; aspect south-southwest; water in abundant supply, and at hand; in short, every requirement to insure not only success but also progress. There could not be a doubt that Van Baerle had become a tulip-grower.

Boxtel at once pictured to himself this learned man, with a capital of four hundred thousand and a yearly income of ten thousand guilders, devoting all his intellectual and financial resources to the cultivation of the tulip. He foresaw his neighbour's success, and he felt such a pang at the mere idea of this success that his hands dropped powerless, his knees trembled, and he fell in despair from the ladder.

And thus it was not for the sake of painted tulips, but for real ones, that Van Baerle took from him half a degree of warmth. And thus Van Baerle was to have the most admirably fitted aspect, and, besides, a large, airy, and well ventilated chamber where to preserve his bulbs and seedlings; while he, Boxtel, had been obliged to give up for this purpose his bedroom, and, lest his sleeping in the same apartment might injure his bulbs and seedlings, had taken up his abode in a miserable garret.

Boxtel, then, was to have next door to him a rival and successful competitor; and his rival, instead of being some unknown, obscure gardener, was the godson of Mynheer Cornelius de Witt, that is to say, a celebrity.

Boxtel, as the reader may see, was not possessed of the spirit of Porus, who, on being conquered by Alexander, consoled himself with the celebrity of his conqueror.

And now if Van Baerle produced a new tulip, and named it the John de Witt, after having named one the Cornelius? It was indeed enough to choke one with rage.

Thus Boxtel, with jealous foreboding, became the prophet of his own misfortune. And, after having made this melancholy discovery, he passed the most wretched night imaginable.

Chapter 6. The Hatred of a Tulip-fancier

From that moment Boxtel's interest in tulips was no longer a stimulus to his exertions, but a deadening anxiety. Henceforth all his thoughts ran only upon the injury which his neighbour would cause him, and thus his favourite occupation was changed into a constant source of misery to him.

Van Baerle, as may easily be imagined, had no sooner begun to apply his natural ingenuity to his new fancy, than he succeeded in growing the finest tulips. Indeed; he knew better than any one else at Haarlem or Leyden – the two towns which boast the best soil and the most congenial climate – how to vary the colours, to modify the shape, and to produce new species.

He belonged to that natural, humorous school who took for their motto in the seventeenth century the aphorism uttered by one of their number in 1653, – "To despise flowers is to offend God."

From that premise the school of tulip-fanciers, the most exclusive of all schools, worked out the following syllogism in the same year: —

"To despise flowers is to offend God.

"The more beautiful the flower is, the more does one offend God in despising it.

"The tulip is the most beautiful of all flowers.

"Therefore, he who despises the tulip offends God beyond measure."

By reasoning of this kind, it can be seen that the four or five thousand tulip-growers of Holland, France, and Portugal, leaving out those of Ceylon and China and the Indies, might, if so disposed, put the whole world under the ban, and condemn as schismatics and heretics and deserving of death the several hundred millions of mankind whose hopes of salvation were not centred upon the tulip.

We cannot doubt that in such a cause Boxtel, though he was Van Baerle's deadly foe, would have marched under the same banner with him.

Mynheer van Baerle and his tulips, therefore, were in the mouth of everybody; so much so, that Boxtel's name disappeared for ever from the list of the notable tulip-growers in Holland, and those of Dort were now represented by Cornelius van Baerle, the modest and inoffensive savant.

Engaging, heart and soul, in his pursuits of sowing, planting, and gathering, Van Baerle, caressed by the whole fraternity of tulip-growers in Europe, entertained nor the least suspicion that there was at his very door a pretender whose throne he had usurped.

He went on in his career, and consequently in his triumphs; and in the course of two years he covered his borders with such marvellous productions as no mortal man, following in the tracks

of the Creator, except perhaps Shakespeare and Rubens, have equalled in point of numbers.

And also, if Dante had wished for a new type to be added to his characters of the Inferno, he might have chosen Boxtel during the period of Van Baerle's successes. Whilst Cornelius was weeding, manuring, watering his beds, whilst, kneeling on the turf border, he analysed every vein of the flowering tulips, and meditated on the modifications which might be effected by crosses of colour or otherwise, Boxtel, concealed behind a small sycamore which he had trained at the top of the partition wall in the shape of a fan, watched, with his eyes starting from their sockets and with foaming mouth, every step and every gesture of his neighbour; and whenever he thought he saw him look happy, or descried a smile on his lips, or a flash of contentment glistening in his eyes, he poured out towards him such a volley of maledictions and furious threats as to make it indeed a matter of wonder that this venomous breath of envy and hatred did not carry a blight on the innocent flowers which had excited it.

When the evil spirit has once taken hold of the heart of man, it urges him on, without letting him stop. Thus Boxtel soon was no longer content with seeing Van Baerle. He wanted to see his flowers, too; he had the feelings of an artist, the master-piece of a rival engrossed his interest.

He therefore bought a telescope, which enabled him to watch as accurately as did the owner himself every progressive development of the flower, from the moment when, in the first

year, its pale seed-leaf begins to peep from the ground, to that glorious one, when, after five years, its petals at last reveal the hidden treasures of its chalice. How often had the miserable, jealous man to observe in Van Baerle's beds tulips which dazzled him by their beauty, and almost choked him by their perfection!

And then, after the first blush of the admiration which he could not help feeling, he began to be tortured by the pangs of envy, by that slow fever which creeps over the heart and changes it into a nest of vipers, each devouring the other and ever born anew. How often did Boxtel, in the midst of tortures which no pen is able fully to describe, – how often did he feel an inclination to jump down into the garden during the night, to destroy the plants, to tear the bulbs with his teeth, and to sacrifice to his wrath the owner himself, if he should venture to stand up for the defence of his tulips!

But to kill a tulip was a horrible crime in the eyes of a genuine tulip-fancier; as to killing a man, it would not have mattered so very much.

Yet Van Baerle made such progress in the noble science of growing tulips, which he seemed to master with the true instinct of genius, that Boxtel at last was maddened to such a degree as to think of throwing stones and sticks into the flower-stands of his neighbour. But, remembering that he would be sure to be found out, and that he would not only be punished by law, but also dishonoured for ever in the face of all the tulip-growers of Europe, he had recourse to stratagem, and, to gratify his hatred,

tried to devise a plan by means of which he might gain his ends without being compromised himself.

He considered a long time, and at last his meditations were crowned with success.

One evening he tied two cats together by their hind legs with a string about six feet in length, and threw them from the wall into the midst of that noble, that princely, that royal bed, which contained not only the "Cornelius de Witt," but also the "Beauty of Brabant," milk-white, edged with purple and pink, the "Marble of Rotterdam," colour of flax, blossoms feathered red and flesh colour, the "Wonder of Haarlem," the "Colombin obscur," and the "Columbin clair terni."

The frightened cats, having alighted on the ground, first tried to fly each in a different direction, until the string by which they were tied together was tightly stretched across the bed; then, however, feeling that they were not able to get off, they began to pull to and fro, and to wheel about with hideous caterwaulings, mowing down with their string the flowers among which they were struggling, until, after a furious strife of about a quarter of an hour, the string broke and the combatants vanished.

Boxtel, hidden behind his sycamore, could not see anything, as it was pitch-dark; but the piercing cries of the cats told the whole tale, and his heart overflowing with gall now throbbed with triumphant joy.

Boxtel was so eager to ascertain the extent of the injury, that he remained at his post until morning to feast his eyes on the

sad state in which the two cats had left the flower-beds of his neighbour. The mists of the morning chilled his frame, but he did not feel the cold, the hope of revenge keeping his blood at fever heat. The chagrin of his rival was to pay for all the inconvenience which he incurred himself.

At the earliest dawn the door of the white house opened, and Van Baerle made his appearance, approaching the flower-beds with the smile of a man who has passed the night comfortably in his bed, and has had happy dreams.

All at once he perceived furrows and little mounds of earth on the beds which only the evening before had been as smooth as a mirror, all at once he perceived the symmetrical rows of his tulips to be completely disordered, like the pikes of a battalion in the midst of which a shell has fallen.

He ran up to them with blanched cheek.

Boxtel trembled with joy. Fifteen or twenty tulips, torn and crushed, were lying about, some of them bent, others completely broken and already withering, the sap oozing from their bleeding bulbs: how gladly would Van Baerle have redeemed that precious sap with his own blood!

But what were his surprise and his delight! what was the disappointment of his rival! Not one of the four tulips which the latter had meant to destroy was injured at all. They raised proudly their noble heads above the corpses of their slain companions. This was enough to console Van Baerle, and enough to fan the rage of the horticultural murderer, who tore his hair at the sight

of the effects of the crime which he had committed in vain.

Van Baerle could not imagine the cause of the mishap, which, fortunately, was of far less consequence than it might have been. On making inquiries, he learned that the whole night had been disturbed by terrible caterwaulings. He besides found traces of the cats, their footmarks and hairs left behind on the battle-field; to guard, therefore, in future against a similar outrage, he gave orders that henceforth one of the under gardeners should sleep in the garden in a sentry-box near the flower-beds.

Boxtel heard him give the order, and saw the sentry-box put up that very day; but he deemed himself lucky in not having been suspected, and, being more than ever incensed against the successful horticulturist, he resolved to bide his time.

Just then the Tulip Society of Haarlem offered a prize for the discovery (we dare not say the manufacture) of a large black tulip without a spot of colour, a thing which had not yet been accomplished, and was considered impossible, as at that time there did not exist a flower of that species approaching even to a dark nut brown. It was, therefore, generally said that the founders of the prize might just as well have offered two millions as a hundred thousand guilders, since no one would be able to gain it.

The tulip-growing world, however, was thrown by it into a state of most active commotion. Some fanciers caught at the idea without believing it practicable, but such is the power of imagination among florists, that although considering the undertaking as certain to fail, all their thoughts were engrossed by

that great black tulip, which was looked upon to be as chimerical as the black swan of Horace or the white raven of French tradition.

Van Baerle was one of the tulip-growers who were struck with the idea; Boxtel thought of it in the light of a speculation. Van Baerle, as soon as the idea had once taken root in his clear and ingenious mind, began slowly the necessary planting and cross-breeding to reduce the tulips which he had grown already from red to brown, and from brown to dark brown.

By the next year he had obtained flowers of a perfect nut-brown, and Boxtel espied them in the border, whereas he had himself as yet only succeeded in producing the light brown.

It might perhaps be interesting to explain to the gentle reader the beautiful chain of theories which go to prove that the tulip borrows its colors from the elements; perhaps we should give him pleasure if we were to maintain and establish that nothing is impossible for a florist who avails himself with judgment and discretion and patience of the sun's heat; the clear water, the juices of the earth, and the cool breezes. But this is not a treatise upon tulips in general; it is the story of one particular tulip which we have undertaken to write, and to that we limit ourselves, however alluring the subject which is so closely allied to ours.

Boxtel, once more worsted by the superiority of his hated rival, was now completely disgusted with tulip-growing, and, being driven half mad, devoted himself entirely to observation.

The house of his rival was quite open to view; a garden

exposed to the sun; cabinets with glass walls, shelves, cupboards, boxes, and ticketed pigeon-holes, which could easily be surveyed by the telescope. Boxtel allowed his bulbs to rot in the pits, his seedlings to dry up in their cases, and his tulips to wither in the borders and henceforward occupied himself with nothing else but the doings at Van Baerle's. He breathed through the stalks of Van Baerle's tulips, quenched his thirst with the water he sprinkled upon them, and feasted on the fine soft earth which his neighbour scattered upon his cherished bulbs.

But the most curious part of the operations was not performed in the garden.

It might be one o'clock in the morning when Van Baerle went up to his laboratory, into the glazed cabinet whither Boxtel's telescope had such an easy access; and here, as soon as the lamp illuminated the walls and windows, Boxtel saw the inventive genius of his rival at work.

He beheld him sifting his seeds, and soaking them in liquids which were destined to modify or to deepen their colours. He knew what Cornelius meant when heating certain grains, then moistening them, then combining them with others by a sort of grafting, – a minute and marvellously delicate manipulation, – and when he shut up in darkness those which were expected to furnish the black colour, exposed to the sun or to the lamp those which were to produce red, and placed between the endless reflections of two water-mirrors those intended for white, the pure representation of the limpid element.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.