

ЭЖЕН СЮ

THE BLACKSMITH'S
HAMMER; OR, THE
PEASANT CODE: A TALE
OF THE GRAND
MONARCH

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Eugène Sue

The Blacksmith's Hammer; or, The Peasant Code: A Tale of the Grand Monarch

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Bulwer Lytton observes of fiction that, when aspiring at something higher than mere romance, it does not pervert, but elucidates the facts of the times in which the scene is placed; hence, that fiction serves to illustrate those truths which history is too often compelled to leave to the tale-teller, the dramatist and the poet. In this story, *The Blacksmith's Hammer; or, The Peasant Code*—the seventeenth of the charming series of Eugene Sue's historic novels, *The Mysteries of the People; or, History of a Proletarian Family Across the Ages*—the author reaches a height in which are combined all the elements that Bulwer Lytton distributes among history, tale, drama and poetry.

The history is clean cut; the tale fascinates; its dramatic presentation is matchless; last, not least, the poetic note is lyric. As historian, as tale-teller, as dramatist and as a poet the author excels himself in this narrative, that serves at once as a sequel of the age described in the previous story, *The Pocket Bible; or, Christian the Printer*, and as prelude to the great epopee of the next story that deals with the French Revolution.

DANIEL DE LEON.

New York, March, 1910.

INTRODUCTION

I, Salaun Lebreann, the son of Stephan, who was the son of Antonicq, who finished the legend of The Pocket Bible, begun by his grandfather Christian the printer – I, Salaun Lebreann, am the writer of the following narrative.

To you, my last-born, Alain Lebreann, the child of my old age, I bequeath this legend, a continuation of our plebeian annals. I shall join to these pages the head of a blacksmith's hammer. It will increase the number of our family relics. You are to transmit it, jointly with our annals, to your own descendants.

My grandfather Antonicq Lebreann died in his sixty-eighth year, on November 11, 1616. Stephan, Antonicq's son, was twenty-three years of age at the time of his father's decease. He continued to be a farmer on the Karnak farm, a dependency of the fief of Mezlean, held under the suzerainty of the seignior of Plouernel. Obedient to the *law of usage*, after a certain number of years Stephan became a vassal of the seignior. At the age of twenty-six, in 1619, he married, and had two sons – myself, Salaun, born in 1625, and my brother Gildas, born in 1628. Our father Stephan, a good man, but timid and resigned, submitted without a murmur to all the impositions, all the affronts, and all the sufferings of vassalage. He died in his fifty-ninth year on February 13, 1651. My brother Gildas, a man of as good, patient and submissive a disposition as my father, succeeded him in the holding of the Karnak farm, located on the coast of Armorican Brittany. Myself, being of a less submissive disposition than Gildas, and having chosen a sailor's life for my vocation, engaged as ship's boy on board one of the vessels in the port of Vannes. I was then fifteen years old. I made many voyages, and attained the office of supercargo, and later of captain of a merchant vessel. Thanks to my earnings, I was later enabled to purchase a ship, and sail it on my own account. In 1646 – during the reign of Louis XIV who succeeded his father Louis XIII – I married for the first time. My first wife was Janik Tankeru, the sister of a blacksmith of Vannes. My dear and lamented wife made my life as happy as circumstances allowed, and I returned to her the happiness I owed her. In 1651 she bore me a son whom I named Nominoë. Alas! I was to survive him. You will now read his history in this narrative that I leave to you, son of Joel – a lamentable narrative which I have written, often moistening it with my tears.

PART I. HOLLAND

CHAPTER I. THE ST. ELOI

Early in the month of August of the year 1672, a violent tempest raged on the coast of Holland. Driven by the storm, and already deprived of one of its masts, the French brigantine St. Eloi "fled before the gale," as mariners put it. With only a little triangular bit of sail spread forward, she strove to run into the port of Delft, which lies not far from The Hague. The enormous waves, furiously dashing against the jetty of the port, completely hid it behind a mist of foam. Aware of his close proximity to land, the captain gave at frequent intervals the signal of distress with two pieces of artillery that were placed upon the forecastle. He sought thereby to attract some daring pilot of the port to take charge of the partly dismantled craft, the plight of which became all the more distressful when a dash of the sea carried away a portion of the rudder, and rendered control of the vessel almost impossible. The St. Eloi had left Calais that morning for Dover; the weather was beautiful, the wind favorable. In the middle of the Channel, however, the wind shifted suddenly to west-northwest, and blew with such fury that, compelled to flee before the tempest, and unable either to keep its course for Dover or return to Calais, the brigantine sought to reach a haven of refuge in one of the ports on the Dutch coast.

The distinguished passengers who chartered the St. Eloi for a passage across the Channel to England were three in number: the Marchioness of Tremblay; her niece, Mademoiselle Bertha of Plouernel; and Abbot Boujaron. They were accompanied by a lackey and a maid. The Marchioness of Tremblay was on the way to join in London her nephew, Bertha's brother, Baron Raoul of Plouernel, who was charged by Louis XIV with a special commission to Charles II, King of England. Although, since the beginning of the year, both the latter power and France were at war with the Dutch Republic, or rather the seven United Provinces, strangers occasionally received "letters of safeguard" from the admiralty at Amsterdam, thanks to which they could cross the Channel without fear of the cruisers of Admiral Ruyter's squadron. Equipped with one of these letters, the St. Eloi was under sail for Dover when the storm overtook her. In order not to stand in the way of the pumps, that were kept busy by as many of the men as the vessel's small crew could afford, bailing the water from a leak in the hold, the passengers were soon obliged to go upon the bridge. Their different attitudes at that critical moment presented striking contrasts. The Marchioness of Tremblay, a woman of ripe age, once reputed a belle but now of haughty demeanor, lay shuddering with fear upon a mattress, stretched out on the vessel's poop; she was supported by her maid, and, in order to prevent her being tossed about by the heavy roll of the ship, she was steadied by a scarf that passed under her arm and was fastened to the taffrail. Beside her, and no less pale than herself, Abbot Boujaron, a man of fifty, short, thick-set and puffy, held himself fast to a shroud with a convulsively clenched hand, while with the other he clung to the arm of his lackey, and emitted plaintive moans, interspersed with bits of expostulatory prayers. Mademoiselle Bertha of Plouernel on the contrary, seemed to take no thought of the danger of the hour, but gave herself over to the imposing poetry of the storm, after having vainly endeavored to reassure her aunt the Marchioness, and induce her to share the serenity that never leaves brave spirits in the lurch. The young girl, barely twenty years of age, was tall, supple, well rounded, with a brunette complexion of radiant beauty. It was emotion and not fear that animated her otherwise pale face, while the spark that shone in her large black eyes, surmounted with well-marked eyebrows, sufficiently denoted the feverish admiration that the sight of the elements in fury inspired her with. With dilating nostrils, a heaving bosom, her forehead lashed by the gale that raised and blew backward

the floating ringlets of her hair, she steadied herself with a firm hand against the rigging of the ship, and yielded to the motion of the rolling and pitching craft with a suppleness that unveiled the elegance of her waist while enabling her to preserve her equilibrium. Mademoiselle Plouernel contemplated in wrapt enthusiasm the spectacle presented to her eyes, all the more indifferent to the danger that threatened her, seeing she did not believe in death. Yes, son of Joel, in keeping with the ancient faith of the Gauls, our fathers, the young girl was upheld by the conviction that, as a consequence of the phenomenon called "death," the soul freed itself of its material wrappage, the body, in order to assume a new form appropriate to its entrance upon other spheres. She firmly believed that, body and soul, spirit and matter, life was renewed, or rather continued, in the starry worlds that spangle the firmament.

A second dash of the sea finished and carried off the brigantine's rudder. The vessel's position became desperate. The captain fired a last signal of distress, still hoping to be heard by the pilots of Delft and to bring them to his aid. The signal was heard. A caravel, a sort of solid yet light ship, that, thanks to its special build, is better able than any other to beat its way against violent winds and over heavy seas, was seen to emerge from the harbor. Tacking with as much skill as daring, at times disappearing in the troughs of the towering waves that seemed to swallow her up, the caravel would again reappear riding their crests and almost lying upon her white sails that grazed the foam of the billows as the wings of a sea bird graze the water. At the risk of foundering, the caravel steadily approached the disabled brigantine.

"Ah," cried the captain of the St. Eloi, "to dare come out to our help in such a storm, the commander of that caravel must be as generous a man as skilful and intrepid a sailor!"

Struck by these words Mademoiselle Plouernel followed with increased interest the manoeuvres of the caravel, that steadily tacked its way towards the distressed brigantine. The sturdy craft went upon a new leg, in order to pass within hailing distance of the brigantine, that now, wholly dismantled and deprived of its rudder, had become the toy of wave and wind, the combined violence of which was driving her towards the shore, where she would inevitably have been dashed to pieces.

Suddenly – a common phenomenon near land – the storm was almost completely hushed; the sea, however, would long continue heavy, and its action, combined with that of the tide, carried the St. Eloi, which was unable to steer herself into port, straight upon the rocks that littered the shore. The caravel had made good use of the last gusts of wind and drawn steadily nearer. She had only a few sailors on board. At the stern and, despite his youth, managing the rudder with a vigorous and experienced hand, stood a mariner of about twenty years. The youth presented a virile and charming picture. His head and neck were bare, his hair and forehead streamed with the spray of the dashing waves. He wore a jacket of red wool and wide breeches of white cloth that were half hidden in his large fisherman's boots. The resolute attitude of the young mariner, who, at the risk of his own life, strove to save the lives of strangers to him; his calm, intelligent and bold face – in short the youth's attitude, appearance and conduct, imparted to the heroism of his action a character of such grandeur and touching generosity that both the courage and personality of the approaching savior of the brigantine made a lively impression upon Mademoiselle Plouernel. As soon as he hove within hailing distance, the young master of the caravel shouted in French to the captain of the St. Eloi that, although the swell of the sea still continued heavy and rendered approach dangerous, he would manoeuvre in such manner as to tow the brigantine into port. Laborious, delicate and difficult was the operation requisite to keep the disabled ship from certain wreck by being cast upon the rocks by the rising tide. The skilful manoeuvre was successfully executed by the master of the caravel. His sailors threw a cable to the brigantine; out came their long oars in order to supplement the dying wind; at the expiration of an hour the St. Eloi, finally out of danger, cast anchor in the harbor of Delft.

CHAPTER II. BERTHA OF PLOUERNEL

Once disembarked at the port of Delft, the Marchioness of Tremblay regained her spirits, that the fright of the tempest had upset, and she remembered often to have met in Paris a certain Monsieur Tilly at the house of Monsieur Van Orbek, a rich Dutchman, who, emulating in sumptuous display the famous contractor Samuel Bernard, gave the handsomest feasts in the world, whither both court and town crowded. On such occasions, Monsieur Tilly more than once gallantly offered the Marchioness the hospitality of his house in The Hague, if she should ever happen to visit that city; his residence, he said, was at her disposal. The Marchioness now remembered the offer, and finding it unpleasant to have to wait in a wretched hostelry of the seaport of Delft for some neutral vessel bound to England – a rare occurrence since the breaking out of the war – the lady despatched an express to Monsieur Tilly, certain that he would deem himself highly honored at extending hospitality to her. Indeed, Monsieur Tilly gallantly hastened in person from The Hague to Delft, whence he himself took the Marchioness, her niece and Abbot Boujaron to The Hague, being at the time all the better able to tender his hospitality to the distinguished guests, seeing that, as he explained, his wife was then at Amsterdam at the sick-bed of her mother.

The Marchioness of Tremblay was speedily installed at The Hague in the residence of Monsieur Tilly, where she occupied on the first floor a vast apartment furnished with the luxury peculiar to those republican navigators, who, trafficking with the whole world, gathered in their homes most precious fabrics, porcelains and furnitures from China and the East Indies, vases from Japan, lacquer cabinets and folding-screens from Coromandel, carpets from Smyrna, glasswork from Venice. All these rare curiosities were found in profusion at Monsieur Tilly's residence. Still suffering from the fatigue of her rough passage, the Marchioness was partly stretched upon a reclining chair, placed near a glass door that opened upon a balcony, sheltered from the rays of the sun and the public gaze by a sort of netting striped red and white. Mademoiselle Plouernel sat not far from her aunt, who, continuing the conversation that the two had been carrying on, proceeded to say:

"You will have to admit, my dear, that the lot of Mademoiselle Kerouaille is worthy of envy. The King – "

But noticing that her niece was not listening, the Marchioness broke off, remarking:

"Bertha, your absentmindedness is singular. What is it that you are thinking about? Tell me!"

"I was thinking of my brother Raoul. I hope his illness will not grow worse during the delay that our journey to London is unfortunately undergoing," answered Mademoiselle Plouernel in accents of deep emotion.

And after a moment's silence she continued:

"But there is in all this something that seems unexplainable to me. Monsieur Noirmont left London two or three days after the date of the letter that informed you of my brother's illness, and still Monsieur Noirmont stated to us only a short time ago, at Versailles, that at the time of his departure from England he left Raoul in perfect health."

"Monsieur Noirmont must have wished to conceal the truth from us," replied the Marchioness, slightly embarrassed; "people always dislike to be the bearers of bad news."

"And yet nothing seemed more sincere than the extreme astonishment with which Monsieur Noirmont was struck when he learned from us of my brother's illness, and – "

"Good God, my dear, I wish I had your facility for doubting facts," said the Marchioness, impatiently interrupting her niece; "but I am not allowed to entertain any such doubts. I only console myself in advance with the thought of the excellent influence that will be exercised upon Raoul's health by my presence, and yours especially – "

"Mine?" answered Bertha sadly; "I hope it will be so."

"That should be, to you, not a hope, but a certainty."

"My elder brother has until now shown so much coolness towards me – "

"My niece, such a reproach!"

"It is not a reproach – it is the expression of a sorrow. For the rest, Raoul and I have spent our childhood and the first years of our youth almost as strangers to each other. He lived near my father, I near my mother. I can not be surprised at Raoul's indifference towards me."

"You greatly err, my dear, with regard to what you wrongly, very wrongly, term his indifference. Do you forget that by virtue of his right of primogeniture, with the death of my brother, he has become the head of our family? The quality of head of our family confers upon Raoul the full authority that your father and mother were vested with during their lives over their children. As a matter of course, such authority imposes upon Raoul, in his relations towards you and Guy, your second brother, a certain degree of reserve, of gravity, I might say of severity that must in no wise be confounded with indifference. He, on the contrary, is exceptionally attached to you. But I must say – and I beg you not to see in my words even the shadow of a reproach," the Marchioness added, insinuatingly, "I must admit that a certain turn to freedom in your disposition, a certain stubborn way of looking at some things from a viewpoint that is wholly opposed to Raoul's, may have occasionally, I shall not say made him take umbrage at you, but may have given some uneasiness to the warm solicitude that he entertains for you – seeing that it is his duty to fill towards you the strict functions of a father."

"I might answer you, aunt, that Raoul showed himself cold and severe towards me before the loss of my father and my poor mother – a loss that would be irreparable to me but for the certainty of some day re-rising into new life with that idolized mother, in the spirit world where we shall all meet again."

"Your father's loss must, accordingly, be less irreparable to you than your mother's," observed the Marchioness with some bitterness; "to say the least, the difference that you establish in your grief for the departed ones, is strange."

"Aunt," replied Bertha with a firm voice, "I respected my father and adored my mother. She nursed me, brought me up, educated me. I never left her. My happiest days were spent at her side in Brittany, in the retirement of our Castle of Plouernel, where I spent my first eighteen years, while all that time my father lived at court. I barely saw him once every year for a short time during his transient visits to the castle when the hunting season would bring him to his domains. So you see, my mother has left me numerous tokens of remembrance. They were continuous and loving, profoundly loving. They render, they will ever render her loss – or rather, her absence – irreparable to me, at least in this world. But let us return to Raoul. As I told you a moment ago, he always showed himself, even when still young, cold and even haughty towards me, whenever he accompanied my father into Brittany, and he felt offended at my having my own way of looking at things, a way that frequently was different from his own."

"The reason is, my dear, that for people of our class there is but one way of looking upon a number of things – such as religion, morals, politics – "

"In that case I must be an exception to the general rule; but that is of no consequence. Believe me, aunt, I have the liveliest desire to find myself mistaken with regard to Raoul's sentiments towards me; and, I must admit it, I have been profoundly touched by his request to see me at a time when, as I hear, he is seized with a grave disease, the reality of which I still wish I could doubt. I did not expect such a proof of tenderness on his part. And so, as I said before, I hope Raoul's illness has not grown worse, seeing that, alas! like so many others, he has preserved the prejudice of death, a thing that adds such cruel agonies to all illness."

"The prejudice of death!" repeated the Marchioness, shrugging her shoulders and hardly able to control herself. "That is one of your extravagances! You set yourself up in rebellion against our holy religion!"

"A sublime extravagance!" replied Bertha with a radiant smile. "It suppresses superstitions; it frees us from the terror of decease; it imparts to us the certainty of living anew near those whom we have loved."

"My dear niece, I would take you to be out of your mind, were it not that I know you really derive pleasure from such eccentricities. But however that may be, I have the infirmity of sharing with your brother and with so many other weak minds the vulgar prejudice of death. I hope, and I have every reason to hope, that the state of Raoul's health, although grave, is by no means alarming. Far away from his own country, his family, his friends, but still considering it to be a sacred duty on his part to remain in London in the service of the King our master, he has fallen into a sort of listless languor, a black melancholy, and he relies upon our presence, and yours especially, to dissipate his distemper."

"A distemper of languor?" replied Mademoiselle Plouernel pensively. "It seems to me such a disease is generally preceded by symptoms of dejection and sadness; but Monsieur Noirmont said to us that when he left Raoul, my brother's spirits, good looks and genuinely French mirthfulness eclipsed the most brilliant seigneurs of the court of King Charles II."

"Oh, I doubt not that! Poor Raoul is capable of the greatest sacrifices in order worthily to represent his master, our great King; he would even suppress his physical pains and moral sufferings."

"Excuse me, aunt, but I am unable to understand you. I was not aware that my brother had a political mission to fill."

"And yet there is nothing more simple! Does not your brother, charged with a mission to King Charles II during the absence of the French ambassador Monsieur Croissy, represent his Majesty Louis XIV at London? Consequently, however deep his melancholia may be, is not my nephew bound to conceal it from the eyes of the English court, so as not to be outdone in gracefulness, wit and mirth by the English courtiers, and to continue to eclipse them all in honor of his master? Thus it is that Raoul is fulfilling the duties imposed upon him by his mission to King Charles. But," added the Marchioness, after this plausible answer to her niece's objections, and wishing, moreover, to change the subject of a conversation that embarrassed her, "but by the way of the good King Charles – the name of that gallant and joyful prince leads me back to the subject that we wandered from with this long digression upon my nephew. I must repeat to you what I was saying and which your absentmindedness at the moment prevented you from hearing. I was speaking of the beautiful young Breton lady."

"What did you say about her, aunt?"

"I was saying: Admit that the lot of the beautiful Mademoiselle Kerouaille, who is to-day the Duchess of Portsmouth, and one of the greatest ladies of England, by reason of the favor that she has received, is a lot worthy of envy."

Bertha of Plouernel shuddered; her beautiful and usually pale visage was suffused by a blush; her black eyebrows contracted; and, gazing at the Marchioness with undisguised amazement, she said:

"Is it to me that you put such a question?"

"What astonishes you, my dear?"

"You ask me whether the lot of Mademoiselle Kerouaille seems to me worthy of being envied?"

"Why, yes, my dear child; the question is quite natural."

"You, then, despise me!" cried Mademoiselle Plouernel with an outburst of indignation. "You, my father's sister! Oh, madam – madam!"

"Truly, niece, I drop from the clouds!" answered the Marchioness with profound sincerity. "What! Do I despise you because I mention to you the enviable lot of a noble young girl who has had the signal honor of serving the interests of the great King, our neighbor – and of meriting the affection and favors of such a powerful monarch!"

"Madam," replied Bertha, interrupting the Marchioness with a trembling voice, "during the nearly eighteen months since I had the misfortune of losing my mother, I have lived with you in Paris

or Versailles; I thought you knew me somewhat; I find that I am mistaken, since you look surprised to see me revolt at infamy, and since you dare to ask me such a question."

"Infamy! In truth, you are losing your mind, my dear niece."

"Not one, but many infamies," Bertha of Plouernel proceeded, with biting satire. "Madam, I have no choice but to say so plainly to you. Thanks to the licence in morals that reigns in your salon, at court and everywhere else, I have despite myself learned things that a young girl should never as much as suspect – the principles that guide the conduct of the great world."

"And what did you learn, niece?"

"Among a thousand other indignities, I learned this, madam: King Charles was still hesitating whether or not to declare war upon the Dutch Republic, where we now are meeting with generous hospitality; Louis XIV thereupon charged the Duchess of Orleans to overcome the indecision of her brother Charles II by whatever means she could. She agreed; departed for London equipped with a considerable sum of money and intentionally leading in her train one of her ladies of honor, a young girl of extraordinary beauty – Mademoiselle Kerouaille. And what was the purpose that caused the Duchess of Orleans to take the handsome girl in her company? It was for the purpose of delivering her to the King in return for his declaration of war upon the Dutch. Lewdness matched with treachery – infamy! Such is the statecraft of these monarchs!"

"One moment, niece. You are mistaken in your appreciations."

"Madam, I said there was not one but several infamies. Did I exaggerate? Let us number them: speculating upon the dissoluteness of the King of England, Louis XIV sends his sister-in-law, the Duchess of Orleans, to fill the role of a coupler – is not that enough of an infamy? And when we see that princess lowering herself to such an ignoble commerce, towards whom? towards her own brother – is there not in that a double infamy?"

"Once more, my niece, what do you know about the negotiations between princes?"

"Finally, Mademoiselle Kerouaille, an accomplice in the ignominious transaction, sells herself to the King of England and accepts the duchy of Portsmouth as the price of her public shame – a further infamy! Shame upon these execrable beings!"

"You seem to forget that you speak of crowned heads!"

"It is true, madam! I forgot that a Prince of the Catholic Church, Bossuet, the Bishop of Meaux, dared to say, in the very house of God, in the presence of the court, assembled on that occasion to hear the funeral oration on the Duchess of Orleans: 'She went on a mission to unite two kingdoms by *pleasing methods*, and her own *virtue* was the sole mediator between the two Kings.' Is such language not infamous enough on the lips of a man invested with an august character? Hypocrisy, servility, cowardice – what apanages to a priest who, rather than corrupt, should purify the human race!"

After having first betrayed her sincere astonishment at the vehement indignation of Mademoiselle Plouernel, and after a sense of suppressed anger and even rage succeeded her astonishment, the Marchioness of Tremblay collected herself, reflected for a moment, and promptly imparting to her features the sweetest expression that they could assume, and to her voice the most affectionate accents into which she was capable of modulating it, she rose from her reclining chair and said to her niece, who was still trembling with contempt and disgust:

"Dear child – come to my arms. Let me embrace you – you are an angel."

Not a little astonished at this outburst of tenderness, the young lady hesitated to respond to the invitation of her aunt, who repeated:

"Yes, come and let me embrace you; you are a noble being, worthy of the name that you carry; you are an angel, an archangel; you have issued triumphant from a trial to which I wished to put you."

"A trial?" queried Mademoiselle Plouernel without any effort at concealing her incredulity; but immediately after, and yielding to the impulse of all pure and straightforward characters, who are ever more disposed to believe good than evil, Bertha approached the Marchioness, who, taking her niece in her arms, pressed the noble girl to her heart and kissed her effusively.

"Blessed be God! It was only a trial!" repeated the young girl, smiling with gratification and feeling her chest relieved of a heavy weight. "But aunt, dear aunt, I mean not to reprove you – only those are tried who are doubted. Did you doubt me?"

"No; of course not! But in our days one sees a King's love turn so many young heads, even the most solid, that – "

"And you mistrusted the solidity of mine?"

"However certain I was, I wished, dear niece, to see you prove it in all the luster of good judgment and purity. Only, and neither do I now mean to convey a reproach, I do deplore that a young person of your birth should, as it sometimes happens with you, forget herself to the point of speaking irreverently of the priests, the bishops, the Princes of the Church, and above all of the great King, our master, of whom your brother has the honor of being one of the most faithful, the most devoted servants."

"Aunt, let us not discuss the worthiness of Bossuet and his fellows, any more than the worthiness of him whom you style your master; he never will be mine. I have but one Master: He thrones in heaven."

"Do doubt; but after God, come the priests, the ministers, the Pope, the bishops, and then comes the King, to whom we owe blind submission, boundless devotion, pious respect."

"Pious respect! When at Versailles I saw that King promenading in public in one carriage with the Queen his wife and his two mistresses – the old and the new – Mademoiselle La Valiere and Madam Montespan! Is such audacity in bad morals to be respected? No! I shall not respect that infamous King who surrounds himself with high-born courtesans!"

"In truth, my dear, you are losing your reason. The violence of your language! Where can you have drawn such principles from?"

"Excuse my Breton frankness, but I could not respect a person who inspires me with aversion, disgust and contempt. What! That prince knows how his scandalous amours afflict the Queen. He is aware of the bitterness of the rivalry between La Valiere and Montespan! And yet, without pity for the laceration of the hearts of those three women, he forces them to gulp down the affront put upon them, to silently swallow their mutual jealousy and resentment, to smother their shame. He forces them to appear in public face to face; he drags them triumphantly after him as if anxious to glory openly in his double adultery! Ah, I repeat it, that ridiculous self-infatuation, that disregard of all sense of chastity, that brutal disdain for all human feelings, that insolent cynicism towards women – no, that never could inspire me with aught but aversion, contempt and disgust!"

"Oh, my niece, in their fervent adoration of their much beloved sovereign, La Valiere, Montespan and the Queen do as people do who make to God a sacrifice of their pains – they offer their torn hearts to their idol, the handsomest, the greatest King in the whole world!"

"Well, aunt, that theory becomes excessively hyperbolic. Have I not seen him, that 'great King,' an undersized man in reality, seeking to add inches to his stature with the aid of immoderately high heels and enormous wigs! Tell me, deprived of his heels, his wigs and, above all, his royal mantle, what, I pray you, is left of the 'idol'? Why, a little stuffed and groomed crow! For the rest, a good carpet dancer, a still better knight of the carrousel; always in red paint, severe, buttressed in the majesty of his trappings, never laughing out of fear to expose his villainous teeth, otherwise negligent of his appearance and never shaving but every three days, passionately fond of perfumery in order to conceal his bad breath, finally having, under the category of truly 'great' nothing to show except his appetite, to judge from his voracity, which I once witnessed at Versailles on a gala day! But raillery carries me away, and I blush, myself," added Mademoiselle Plouernel, whose features quickly assumed an expression of deep sadness. "Am I ever to forget that my mother's brother finished his days in a dungeon, the victim of the iniquity of Louis XIV!"

CHAPTER III. THE HUGUENOT COLONEL

The Marchioness of Tremblay had her secret reasons to suppress her own sentiments, and not to fulminate against what she termed the "enormities of her niece," who, however, on this occasion, had given stronger vent than ever before to her hostility for the "idol" who was desolating Gaul. Accordingly, Bertha's aunt contented herself with a few forced smiles, and seeking to give a different turn to the conversation that, besides being generally distasteful to her, threw doubts into her mind concerning the secret plans that she was pursuing, she observed in a mild tone:

"After all, my dear, the unwonted vehemence of your language has its excuse in this, that the contagion of the country on whose shores we suffered shipwreck has smitten you. This wicked little heretical republic, once so severely chastised by Louis XIV, has always held our great King in particular aversion. The heretical and republican pestilence must have mounted to your head; who knows," she added with an affectation of archness, "but you may come out of the country a full-fledged Huguenot."

"I should then have, at least, the consolation of knowing that I shall not be the first or only Huguenot in our family," answered Mademoiselle Plouernel, whose features the line of thought into which her aunt's words threw her seemed suddenly to overcast with pensiveness; "I would be but following the example of one of our ancestors who was not much of a partisan of royalty. Was not my father's grandfather a Huguenot? Did not Colonel Plouernel, as he was then called, take part in the religious wars of the last century under the great Coligny, one of whose bravest officers he proved himself? Did he not fight valiantly against the royal and Catholic armies?"

"Alas, it is but too true. The apostasy of that Plouernel is a blot upon our family. He was the youngest son of the family. After his eldest brother, the Count, and the latter's son, the Viscount, were both killed in the front ranks of the royal and Catholic army, at the battle of Roche-la-Belle, fighting against the rebellious heretics, the Huguenot colonel became by that catastrophe the head of our house, and came into possession of its vast domains. Unfortunately, his son shared the paternal vice of heresy, but at last his grandson, who was my father, re-entered, thanks to God, the bosom of the Catholic Church, and resumed the observance of our old traditions of love, respect and loyalty to our Kings. Let us leave the two Plouernels, the only two unworthy members of our family, buried in their double felony. We should endeavor to forget that the two ever lived."

"It goes against my grain, aunt, to contradict you, but I can assure you that Colonel Plouernel, by reason of his courage, his virtues and the nobility of his character, is perhaps the only male member of whom our family may be justly proud."

As Mademoiselle Plouernel was saying these last words she happened to cast her eyes in the direction of the net awning that sheltered from the rays of the sun the wide balcony near which she was seated. She remained silent for a moment, while her eyes, looking intently into the space that stretched before Monsieur Tilly's house, seemed to follow with so much interest someone who was passing on the street, that, half rising from her easy-chair, the Marchioness inquisitively asked her niece:

"What is it you see out there? You seem to be absorbed in deep contemplation."

"I am looking at the young mariner whom you know," answered Bertha without evincing the slightest embarrassment; "he was just passing with a grey-haired man, I doubt not his father; there is a marked resemblance between the two. Both have very sympathetic ways and faces."

"Of what mariner are you speaking, if you please? I know nobody of that class."

"Why, aunt, can you have so soon forgotten the services rendered us when we were in mortal danger – you who believe in death? Would not the brigantine on which we embarked from Calais have foundered with every living soul on board, had it not been for the heroic action of that young

mariner, French like ourselves, who braved the tempest in order to come to our aid, and snatch us from the imminent danger that we ran?"

"Well! And did not Abbot Boujaron give the mariner ten louis in my name, in payment for the service that he rendered us? We are quits with him."

"It is true – and immediately upon receiving the remuneration, which went unaccompanied by a single courteous word, or a single expression that came from the heart, the young mariner turned, threw the ten louis into the cap of an invalid sailor who was begging on the wharf, and our generous rescuer said with a smile to the poor man: 'Take this, my friend, here are ten louis that Monsieur the Abbot gives you – for you to pray for the absolution of his sins; we all need being prayed for, abbots as much as anybody else.' And with a respectful salute he walked away."

"And that was what I call a piece of extreme impertinence!" interjected the Marchioness, interrupting her niece. "The idea of giving the ten louis to the beggar to pray for the absolution of the Abbot's sins! Was not that to insinuate that the holy man had a heavily loaded conscience? I was not aware of the fellow's effrontery and ingratitude; I was still too sea-sick and under the effect of the fright we went through. Well, then, to return to the salt water rat, the fellow's disdain for the remuneration offered him, cancels even more completely whatever debt we may have owed him."

"That is not my opinion, aunt. Accordingly I requested our host, Monsieur Tilly, to be kind enough to ascertain the name and address of our brave countryman, who can only be a temporary resident of Delft – to judge by what has been reported to me."

"And for what purpose did you make the *kind* inquiry, dear niece?"

"I wish to commission Monsieur Tilly to assure our generous rescuer of our gratitude, and to ask him to excuse the strange conduct of Monsieur the Abbot towards him – excuses that, I must admit, I had not the courage to offer on the spot; I felt so confused at the humiliation that he was put to, and, besides, I felt too indignant at the conduct of the Abbot to trust myself to speak to him. Just now, as I saw him crossing the square –"

"You probably had a wish to call him from the window?" asked the Marchioness suffocating with repressed anger. "Truly, dear niece, you are losing your head more and more. Such a disregard for propriety on the part of a person of your quality!"

"I never thought of calling our countryman out of the window; I was only sorry that Monsieur Tilly did not happen to be with us at the time. He might have gone out after him and asked him to step in."

"My dear, what you say upon this subject is so absurd, that I even prefer to hear your praises of Colonel Plouernel – although that topic is not of the most edifying."

"Nothing easier than to accommodate you, aunt," answered Bertha with a smile that seemed to foreshadow numerous subjects for the suffocation of the Marchioness. "In a manuscript left by Colonel Plouernel under the title of 'Instructions to His Son' a most extraordinary fact was recorded. In reminding his son of the antiquity of his family, which goes back to the time of the conquest of Gaul by the Franks, the colonel added the natural observation that there are no conquerors without conquered, and that the Franks, from whom we of the noble race claim to descend, despoiled and then enslaved the Gauls. He then proceeded to say that a family of the Gallic race, a descendant of whom the colonel became acquainted with at the siege of La Rochelle, handed down to its own members from age to age, first, from the time of the conquest of Gaul by the Romans, and then, from the conquest of the country by the Franks, a series of legends that chronicled the trials and misfortunes undergone by the several and succeeding members of that family, which, strange coincidence! on the occasion of the frequent uprisings of the enslaved Gauls, more than once fought arms in hand and victoriously against the seigneurs of our own Frankish house! Our ancestor, the colonel, approves and extols the right of conquered peoples to rise in insurrection."

"Towards the end of the last century," Mademoiselle Plouernel proceeded as in a reverie, "during the siege of La Rochelle, Colonel Plouernel became strongly attached by bonds of friendship

to one of the descendants of that Gallic family, an armorer by occupation, and one of the bravest soldiers of Admiral Coligny. The armorer being, at the close of the religious war, ardently desirous of returning to Brittany and establishing himself there, in the ancient cradle of his family, which, according to the chronicles of his kin, owned their fields not far from Karnak, and Colonel Plouernel, on his part, wishing to do a kindness to his friend, the armorer of La Rochelle, our ancestor offered the brave Huguenot a long lease of the farm of Karnak, which he owned and which he transmitted to his descendants together with the domain of Mezlean. But, according to the feudal custom, 'use' and 'habitation' change after a certain number of years into 'vassalage,' and so it has come about that the descendants of the armorer, they never having left the domain of Mezlean, are to-day vassals of my brother. My mother obtained the certainty of this fact by ordering the bailiff of Plouernel to communicate with the bailiff of Mezlean and inquire whether a family named Lebreun, that is the family's name, lived on the farm of Karnak. The bailiff answered that in the year 1573 a man of that name had taken the farm in lease and that the farm was still cultivated by the descendants of the same family. I doubt not that, owing to the proximity of the port of Vannes, the elder brother of the present farmer of Karnak took to the sea, a calling that carries with it enfranchisement from vassalage. Struck by the circumstances mentioned in the manuscript of Colonel Plouernel, my mother arranged an excursion to Mezlean in order to make the acquaintance of a family in so many ways interesting to know. We were to make the journey only shortly before the fatal illness that separated me from my mother – until the day when I shall live again at her side in the world that she now inhabits," added Bertha with a sigh, and she relapsed into pensive silence.

"But, in short, what conclusion did that Huguenot colonel, and do you, draw from the, I must admit, extraordinary facts registered in that manuscript? I find myself unable to follow your reasoning."

"The conclusion is simple and touching, it serves as the moral to the manuscript left by Colonel Plouernel; he closes it with these words to his son: 'My child, the death of my dear brother has made me master of the immense domains of our house in Auvergne, in Beauvoisis and in Brittany; thousands of vassals inhabit those domains. But never forget this – our vast acres and large wealth as well as our nobility have for their origin an iniquitous and bloody conquest; these lands that to-day are ours and over which we lord it, once belonged to the Gauls who, from being free, were dispossessed, subjugated and reduced to a frightful condition of slavery by the Franks, our ancestors. Our present vassals are the descendants of that disinherited race which has been successively the slaves, serfs and vassals of our ancestors. Show yourself, accordingly, charitable, compassionate, equitable, fraternal, benevolent, obedient to the humane law of the Christian faith. Alas! however generous your conduct may be towards them, never could it expiate the wrongs to which our conquering race has subjected the Gallic generations for now more than ten centuries. To the end that you may know and entertain a just horror for so much iniquity and all the sufferings that it entailed, I shall subjoin to these pages several fragments of the history of a family of Gallic origin, the family of Lebreun of Karnak – '"

"Niece!" cried the Marchioness indignantly, "I can no longer listen to such enormities!"

The Marchioness of Tremblay was interrupted in the flow of her indignation by the entrance of Abbot Boujaron, her confessor, intimate friend, and, in short, her paramour.

CHAPTER IV. THE LOST LETTER

Abbot Boujaron's worried looks, the disorder into which his wig, his neckerchief and his cloak were thrown, threw the Marchioness of Tremblay into such alarm that, wholly forgetting the subject of her conversation with Mademoiselle Plouernel, she cried: "My God, Abbot, what has happened? You are all upset; you seem to be in great excitement; you look as if you had just come out of a scuffle."

"I have good reason to be uneasy, dear Marchioness. I have mislaid the letter that we wrote this morning to your nephew – the confidential letter that you know of."

"What!" replied the Marchioness visibly terrified. "Was not the letter put carefully folded in the pocket of your coat? I put it there myself. It can not have been mislaid."

"I was on my way to the house of the person whom, as we decided, I was to call upon in order to obtain some further information from him and add it to the letter, on which account it was left unsealed, when, crossing a large square, I was overtaken and soon found myself surrounded by a big crowd clamoring for the death of the De Witt brothers and the French."

"What De Witt brothers?" asked the Marchioness. "Are they the two intractable republicans whom Monsieur Estrade spoke to us about when he returned from his embassy to this country?"

"They are both of them men cast in the mold of Plutarch, to judge by what Monsieur Tilly, our host, was telling us of them yesterday," observed Mademoiselle Plouernel, emerging from the reverie in which she was steeped since the arrival of the Abbot; "I could not tire of hearing him speak of the domestic virtues of the two brothers, whom he considers to be the greatest living citizens of Holland, and men of distinguished probity."

"My dear daughter," answered the Abbot, "our host belongs to the same political party as those De Witts; as such he has his reasons to give them a high place – in your estimation."

"But the letter," put in the Marchioness with increasing anxiety, "how comes it to be mislaid, perhaps lost?"

"Swallowed up, as I found myself, by that loudly vociferating mob that was rushing towards the prison where one of the two De Witt brothers is confined; pushed, hustled, shoved about, and almost suffocated by that plebeian flood, the current of which was carrying me away despite all that I could do, I made frantic efforts to extricate myself from the surging crowd; in my struggle my frock was unfastened, and I suppose the letter dropped out as I was being whirled about – unless I inadvertently pulled it out myself when I took my handkerchief to wipe the perspiration that streamed down my forehead, after I had finally succeeded in getting clear of the bawling, threatening and swearing mob."

"I am distracted at the loss of that letter. It may fall into the hands of and be read by some indiscreet fellow – you understand me, Abbot? – that would be most disagreeable and compromising."

"I understand you but too well, Marchioness! Only too well! I therefore went twice over the road that I traveled, but all in vain; I could not find the letter! Most unfortunately it was unsealed. The most scrupulous man would have been justified to cast his eyes over it – and thus inform himself upon its contents."

"Truly, aunt," put in Mademoiselle Plouernel, "I fail to understand the deep anxiety that the loss of a letter, that seems to have been written to my brother in order to inform him of the delay in our arrival in England, can cause you and Monsieur the Abbot. The matter is a trifle; it can have no serious results; cease to fret about it."

"There are things, my niece, the wide bearings of which you can not understand," answered the Marchioness of Tremblay sententiously; "it is enough that you know that the loss of this letter is most regrettable."

At this moment the Marchioness's lackey entered the room after announcing himself with a rap at the door, and said to his mistress:

"Madam, there is a man who asks to see Monsieur the Abbot without delay on an important matter."

"Who is he?"

"He is a Frenchman, madam."

"Does he seem to be noble?"

"Yes, madam, he carries a sword."

"Marchioness," said the Abbot excitedly as if struck by a sudden thought, "it may be this individual found the letter, and is bringing it back to me. God be praised! our alarm will be at end! Oh, I hope it may be so!"

"But how could the stranger know your address?"

"Did I not write to Raoul that we were stopping with Monsieur Tilly?"

"In that case, Abbot," replied the Marchioness with an accent of extreme apprehension, "the stranger must have read the letter! We would have a stranger informed upon our plans! We must have light upon this, and quickly."

And addressing the lackey:

"Introduce the stranger immediately, and then withdraw."

"The more I think upon it," said Mademoiselle Plouernel to herself, astonished and pensive, "all the more unexplainable does my aunt's and the Abbot's uneasiness seem to me."

The personage whom the lackey introduced into the salon was a man of about forty-five years of age; he was simply dressed, without lace or embroidery; for all sign of rank he wore on his shoulders a scarlet knot of the color of the feather in his grey felt hat, and the ribbon of his sword that hung from a leather baldric. The tawny complexion of the stranger, his quick, penetrating eye, black as his moustache, seemed to indicate a southern extraction. Of middle size, robust and sinewy, resolute in his port and endowed with a physiognomy in which intelligence and wit vied with boldness, everything about him revealed a man of energy and decision, but so completely master of himself that nothing, except what he had no interest in concealing, would be allowed to rise to the surface. The new personage presented himself in the salon with complete ease, bowed respectfully to the Marchioness and her niece, and looked from the one to the other in silence with so marked, so fixed a gaze, that the Marchioness of Tremblay felt embarrassed and said to her niece:

"Come, Bertha, let us withdraw to my chamber, and leave Monsieur the Abbot with monsieur."

Bertha of Plouernel was preparing to follow her aunt when, after having again contemplated the young maid, the stranger bowed once more to the Marchioness, and said:

"If Madam the Marchioness will allow, the interview that I desire to hold with her and with monsieur, Abbot Boujaron, will take place in the presence of Mademoiselle Plouernel. It is proper, it is even necessary that this should be."

"You know us, monsieur?" said the Marchioness, not a little astonished. "You know our names?"

"I have the honor, madam; and my little knowledge extends further than that," answered the stranger with a singular smile, again casting a penetrating glance at Mademoiselle Plouernel, as if he sought to judge her mind by the expression on her face. On his face, in turn, the evidence of a heightening interest in the girl could be detected. But as these manifestations passed unperceived by Bertha, she felt hurt by the persistence of the stranger's gaze, she blushed, and taking a step towards the door of her aunt's chamber said to the Marchioness:

"Excuse me, aunt, if I go and leave you with the gentlemen."

"Mademoiselle," said the stranger warmly, as he divined the maid's thoughts, "I conjure you, do not impute the obstinacy of my gaze to a disregard of the respect due you, and with which I am profoundly penetrated; I sought to read and I did read on your features the uprightness and nobility of your heart; I doubly congratulate myself on being able to render you a service, a great service."

"Me, monsieur?" answered Mademoiselle Plouernel in great astonishment, yet struck by the accent of unquestionable sincerity in the stranger's words. "What service can you render to me, me whom you do not know, and whom you now see for the first time? Be kind enough to explain yourself more clearly."

"Monsieur," said the Marchioness haughtily to the stranger, as he was about to answer Bertha, "you introduced yourself into this house under pretext of soliciting an interview, which Monsieur Abbot Boujaron has condescended to grant you. That notwithstanding, you have hitherto addressed mademoiselle only – a violation of propriety towards me and Monsieur the Abbot."

"Moreover, monsieur," added the Abbot, "we are wholly in the dark as to who you are. Your language is as strange as your visit."

"I am your obedient servant, Monsieur Abbot," answered the stranger, bowing with sardonic courtesy, "and I shall, if you please, answer Mademoiselle Plouernel, who has done me the honor of asking me what the service is that I am happy enough to be able to render her. The service is summed up in this simple advice: Mademoiselle, go not to England; refuse to undertake the voyage."

A tremor ran over Bertha's frame; for an instant she remained dumb with stupefaction, while, scarlet with confusion and apprehension, both her aunt and the Abbot exchanged significant looks that betrayed their embarrassment. Struck speechless for an instant, Mademoiselle Plouernel turned to the stranger and asked:

"And why, monsieur, do you warn me against the journey to England?"

"For two reasons, mademoiselle, two important reasons – "

"Monsieur," the Abbot interrupted the stranger with, in an icy tone, "I wish to call your attention, first, to the fact that you have committed a breach of confidence; secondly, that you have not understood a word of the letter that you found and that you took the freedom of reading – an indiscretion that a man of good breeding would have carefully guarded against."

"And I, in turn, will call your attention, Monsieur Abbot," retorted the stranger, "first, to the fact that to read an unsealed letter, found on the pavement of a public thoroughfare, is no breach of confidence; secondly, that, without priding myself on being gifted with extraordinary intellectual power, yet am I intelligent enough to understand the value of words. For that reason I have advised mademoiselle not to go to England, and resolutely to refuse to undertake the journey."

"Monsieur," broke in Bertha with profound feeling, as she yielded to a sudden and painful sense of danger that flashed through her mind. "I ask it as a favor of you, explain yourself clearly. Be good enough to give me your reasons for the advice."

"One moment, my dear child," the Abbot hastened to interpose, in order to parry off the stranger's answer; "I am the writer of that letter; it is for me to speak intelligently upon it. I can tell monsieur that the despatch which he read is addressed to an envoy of his Majesty Louis XIV at the court of his Majesty Charles II, and that it deals with very delicate affairs of state. Now, then, I must add, that unless one be the most reckless of men, which I certainly am not, one does not conduct a correspondence upon matters of such a nature, except in cipher, or by means of enigmatic phrases, that bear a double sense, both of which seem perfectly logical on their face, but the real purport of which remains secret between the correspondents themselves, who are alone able to interpret it. It will be well for monsieur to understand that."

"If that is the case, Monsieur Abbot, there will be nothing left to me but to admit a mistake," replied the stranger with mock humility, "a mistake, however, that was quite excusable, and of which I request Mademoiselle Plouernel herself to be the judge," he added, taking the letter out of his pocket, "from the terms in which this interesting missive is couched."

"Monsieur, the reading of the letter is wholly superfluous, it being established that the letter no wise concerns mademoiselle."

"No doubt," replied the stranger, "mademoiselle is not touched upon in it except in an enigmatic and mysterious manner. Accordingly, when Monsieur the Abbot writes to Monsieur the Count of Plouernel:

"We have all reason to hope that your sister's matchless beauty will produce a lively impression upon the King of England when she is presented to him, and may induce him to decide – "

"But, monsieur, that is intolerable!" cried the Marchioness, "you are outrageously abusing our patience – you compel me to request that you leave our presence!"

"Monsieur, I listen to you," observed Mademoiselle Plouernel, "and believe me, I shall never forget the service that you will have rendered me. Be kind enough to continue the reading of the letter."

Recognizing the futility of any further objection to the reading of the despatch, the Marchioness and the Abbot crossed their arms, raised their eyes to heaven and assumed the appearance of resigned innocence. Addressing himself to Bertha the stranger proceeded:

"I shall pass over the details of the incident at sea that obliged the vessel on which you, mademoiselle, had embarked, to put in at the port of Delft. I now come to the interesting portion of the letter:

"You informed us, my dear Raoul, that the influence is on the wane of Mademoiselle Kerouaille, who is now the Duchess of Portsmouth and was taken to Charles II by his sister, Madam the Duchess of Orleans, at the beginning of this year in order to urge the libertine King more effectively, by means of the charms of the beautiful Krouaill and a present of a few millions, to sign the treaty of alliance between England and France against the Republic of the United Provinces; you add that, in even measure as the influence of the Duchess of Portsmouth wanes, waxes the ascendancy of my Lord Arlington, a bitter partisan of the alliance between England, Spain and the United Provinces, over the vacillating and profligate Rowley, as the familiars of Charles II call his Majesty, and that the said my Lord Arlington has for his assistant and agent a certain Nell Gwynne, a low-lived creature, an incarnate she-devil, who swears, curses, drinks and gets drunk like a trooper, but whose sprightliness, noisy hilarity and brazenness seem greatly to delight his Majesty. From all of this it may hap, as you indicate, that, aided by the nymph and the doubloons of Spain and the Republic, King Charles, after having tired of Mademoiselle Kerouaille and dissipated the present of several millions bestowed upon him by our own master under the pretext of *catholicity*, may go so far as to break the alliance with France and return to the alliance with Spain and the Republic of the United Provinces. Meditation upon those grave possibilities suggested the thought to you, my dear pupil, that the magnificent eyes and challenging beauty of our own Bertha might operate a salutary change in the now unfavorable disposition of old Rowley, counterbalance the influence of Nell Gwynne, and confirm King Charles in his alliance with our master. Struck by the importance of your suggestion, over which madam your aunt and I have long reflected, the expedient seemed excellent to us and also so pressing, that, without answering you, and resorting to an innocent ruse, we have persuaded your sister that you were taken so seriously ill as to induce her to proceed with us to England. We prepared the agreeable surprise for you, but the violent storm of which I gave you a sketch compelled us to put in at Delft. I am now writing to you from The Hague, in order that you may not feel uneasy at the prolonged delay in our answer.

"So then, my dear pupil, at our speedy arrival in England you are expected to have so completely recovered from your sickness, with the help of God, that there will be no trace of it left to be seen. You will then hasten to present at the court of London Madam the Marchioness of Tremblay and Mademoiselle Plouernel. So that, unless our justified expectations should unhappily be dashed, King Charles, dazzled by the matchless beauty of our Bertha, will be set aflame as usual. We have all reason to hope that your sister's matchless beauty will produce a lively impression upon the King of England when she is presented to him, and may induce him to decide to continue the alliance with France against the United Provinces.

"I must admit, my dear boy, that I contemplate with no less delight than yourself the huge satisfaction that such a result must afford our master; and I can well understand how in your letter you judiciously passed in review the prodigious favors that were showered upon Monsieur Vivonne from the time that his sister, the Marchioness of Montespan, was honored with the attention of the King, and had the august honor of presenting him with progeny. Accordingly, if our project succeed as we wish, although the affair will have to happen in England, you will not therefore, my dear pupil, in what concerns the favor of our master, be any less the *Vivonne* of our beautiful *Montespan*."

"I wish to add that, having put my sojourn at The Hague to good use, I have come to the conclusion, arrived at upon my own observation and after certain conversations that I had with a member of our Society, who is not suspected of belonging to us, A. M. D. G. (conversations, the import of which I shall add at the post-script of this letter, which I shall seal at the house of the good father) I have come to the conclusion that a formidable blow can be dealt to this bedeviled Republic, this hot-bed of heresy, by – "

But the stranger broke off his reading of the letter, and addressing Mademoiselle Plouernel:

"The rest of the missive only refers to some confidential communications from a member of the Society of Jesus, to which Monsieur the Abbot has the privilege of belonging, or, rather, with which he is affiliated. These confidential communications, mademoiselle, are of no interest whatever to you, since they only refer to the affairs of the Republic. When I read this letter, which fell into my hands by the merest accident, I revolted at the thought of the unworthy role prepared for a young girl who was ignorant of such machinations, and was, perhaps, worthy of profound respect. Accordingly, I decided to enlighten her upon the dark plot that was being concocted against her. Such, mademoiselle, was the only purpose of my visit to this house; and when I read in your face the nobility of your heart, and the loftiness of your sentiments I applauded myself doubly for having been able to inform and warn you concerning the disgraceful projects of your aunt, and to enlighten you upon an odious intrigue."

An interval of silence followed the communication of Abbot Boujaron's diplomatic missive and the last words of the stranger. Although nailed to the floor with consternation, both the Marchioness and the Abbot were astonished at seeing Mademoiselle Plouernel listen to the reading of the letter without the slightest interruption. Indeed, the young girl remained speechless, overwhelmed; her eyes were fixed in space, her bosom heaved, and her lips were contracted in a desolate smile.

"Monsieur," she finally said, addressing the stranger with an accent of profound gratitude, "it goes beyond my power to express to you my gratitude for having judged me favorably, and I shall, in your presence, declare my thoughts in full upon this affair to my aunt, the Marchioness of Tremblay." And addressing her aunt in a collected voice she proceeded deliberately: "I now know, madam, how you and my brother proposed to exercise towards me the guardianship with which you were entrusted; I shall spare you my reproaches; they could not be understood of you; you lack the moral sense; but this much I here declare to you – I shall not go to England, and I am resolved no longer to live with you, madam, neither at Paris nor at Versailles; I shall henceforth never leave Brittany; I shall reside at Plouernel or at Mezlean, having the right to live in my father's house."

"My God, mademoiselle," replied the Marchioness with sardonic bitterness, "your virtue is strangely resentful and savage! Why such a display of anger? Your brother considered that your presence at the court in London might be of some service to the King our master. Where is the harm in that, I ask you to tell me? Would you not remain free, at full liberty to encourage or reject his Britannic Majesty's advances? If not to you, then there will be others to whom King Charles may address his homage."

"Monsieur, did you hear?" said Mademoiselle Plouernel, turning towards the stranger and unable to conceal the disgust that her aunt's words caused her. "Could the infamous thought be expressed more discreetly – the thought that my dishonor should subserve the violence, the cupidity, the ambition and the vainglory of princes bent upon oppressing the people!"

"Mademoiselle," said the stranger, deeply affected and struck with the admirable expression of the young girl's features as she uttered the lofty words that he had just heard, "some day, perhaps, I may remind you of your brave malediction of the oppressors."

Not a little surprised at these words, Mademoiselle Plouernel was about to ask the stranger for an explanation, when Monsieur Tilly entered the salon. The new arrival seemed a prey to overpowering emotion. His face looked haggard, his gait was almost tottering. The moment, however, that he noticed the presence of the stranger, he hastened to him, saying:

"Monsieur Serdan, do you know what is going on in the city?"

And taking him aside Monsieur Tilly spoke to Monsieur Serdan for several minutes in a low voice, after having politely excused himself with the Marchioness for holding in her presence a private conversation, the gravity and urgency of the subject being his apology for such discourteous conduct.

"That bad man's name is Serdan. Do not forget it, Marchioness," whispered the Abbot; "he must be one of our King's enemies – and also an enemy of the holy Society of Jesus. Forget not his name —*Serdan*."

"I shall remember it well, my dear Abbot; and there will be others to learn it also. Oh, if we only were in France! A *lettre de cachet* would throw the insolent fellow into the Bastille, he would sleep there this very night, and he never would come out again."

Mademoiselle Plouernel relapsed into her own painful train of thoughts, while her aunt and the Abbot exchanged a few words in a low voice, and Monsieur Tilly continued to impart the news of the day to Monsieur Serdan, who, after hearing him to the end, exclaimed: "But that would be monstrous! No! No! Impossible!"

"After what I have just learned, there is hardly any room left to doubt the execrable iniquity that is about to be perpetrated," put in Monsieur Tilly. "For the rest, within an hour, I shall know all – we shall then take council together."

"But what does John De Witt think of all this?"

"Relying upon his brother's innocence and upon the justice of the tribunal, can he remotely suspect such barbarity? I shall proceed to his house after issuing orders to the cavalry of The Hague, which I command and with which I can count, to keep themselves ready to take horse. I anticipate a serious riot."

"I shall meet you at John De Witt's house. There are two of my countrymen from Brittany whom I wish to introduce to him. Until you deny or confirm the horrible tidings that you have just imparted to me, and which I must still doubt, I shall not say a word to John De Witt on the subject," answered Monsieur Serdan.

And making a profound bow to Bertha of Plouernel: "Should I never again have the honor of meeting you, mademoiselle, I shall ever preserve the most touching remembrance of the loftiness of your sentiments. But should I meet you again, I shall allow myself to remind you of the noble words that you uttered in favor of the downtrodden."

As he was about to leave the room, Monsieur Serdan said to Monsieur Tilly: "I shall await you at John De Witt's residence. Do not delay."

"I shall be there shortly, so soon as my dispositions are taken," answered Monsieur Tilly.

Upon Monsieur Serdan's departure, Madam Tremblay assumed her most smiling expression and observed to Monsieur Tilly:

"What an amiable man this Monsieur Serdan is! Tell us, I pray you, monsieur, where is he from? where does he belong? who is he? what is his rank? We feel particularly interested in him. We should be pleased to be edified on that subject."

"Please excuse me, Marchioness," answered Monsieur Tilly, "at this moment I am pressed for time and have no leisure to post you fully upon Monsieur Serdan. He is an honorable man and close friend of mine. I came in haste to impart to you, madam, some rather disagreeable news – terrible things that our city is just now the theater of."

"What is the matter, monsieur?" inquired the Marchioness. "This morning the Abbot noticed considerable excitement among the populace. Are matters assuming a grave aspect?"

"Yes, madam, there is an intense excitement in The Hague. It is the result of two circumstances – one, the manoeuvres of the agents of the Prince of Orange, the head of the party opposed to that of the De Witt brothers; the other – pardon, madam, the frankness of my words – the other circumstance is the report of the atrocities committed in our country by the armies of Louis XIV. There are letters circulating in The Hague to-day from several of our provinces which the royal troops have invaded. The atrocities that those letters report the French army guilty of have exasperated our people. Our party is charged with connivance in these deeds, and even with complicity in the treachery of Louis XIV towards the Republic; and we are referred to as the *French party* because our party sustains the policy of the De Witts in the matter of a French alliance. I enter into these details, madam, in order to inform you that, such is the popular effervescence at this moment, you would run grave risks if you were to be seen on the streets and recognized as French. I therefore take the liberty to impress upon you, as well as upon Mademoiselle Plouernel and the Abbot, the wisdom of remaining indoors to-day. Finally, should there be any serious disorders on the streets, do not show yourselves at the windows. Even so, I pray to God that the house may be respected in case popular passion becomes inflamed, as I much fear it will be. I need not add, madam, how painful it is to me to find the hospitality, that it has been my honor to tender to you, disturbed in such a way!"

Mademoiselle Plouernel listened in silence to this conversation, and seeing both her aunt and the Abbot turn pale, even tremble and exchange frightened looks, the young girl said to them with bitter irony: "What else do you expect? We are not here at the court of Versailles! Here the perjury, the iniquity, the deeds of violence of your master appear in their true and horrible colors. Who knows but this very day the deserved execration, inspired by 'Louis the Great' for himself, may cost us our lives! Oh! Thank God, it is only with joy that I would at this hour leave this world, to reunite myself with my mother!"

Mademoiselle Plouernel owed to her mother her virile hatred of wrong, her independent spirit, her opinions so wholly at variance with those that prevailed at court. To her mother also she owed her firm faith in immortality, the faith of our own Gallic forefathers. Brought up in the Reformed religion, Madam Plouernel was forced to embrace Catholicism when still quite young, and yielding to the importunities of her father and mother, she espoused the Count of Plouernel. At the bottom of her heart, however, she preserved, her abjuration notwithstanding, that "Huguenot leaven," the generous ferment of which imparts to the character sooner or later a spirit of independence, and of free inquiry. Madam Plouernel's marriage was far from being a happy one. After she presented two sons to her husband, he, feeling certain of the continuance of his stock, ceased to pay any regard to his wife. Intent upon indulging his scandalous amours, he left her in Brittany in the Castle of Plouernel, where she was thenceforth to live in absolute seclusion, with no other care or happiness than the education of her youngest child Bertha.

The Countess had a brother, who was tenderly devoted to her. Bold and of an adventurous disposition, he devoted himself to the navy. When still a young man he commanded a royal frigate. Having remained a Huguenot, like his admiral, Duquesne, he detested the despotism of Louis XIV, and never made his appearance at court. Dearly loving his sister, and well acquainted with the immoral character of the Count of Plouernel, he sought, though in vain, to dissuade his family from a marriage the sad consequences of which he clearly foresaw, and he embarked upon a long and distant cruise. Kept far away from France by a variety of events, he learned, upon his return home, of the sort of exile that his sister was doomed to, and of the excesses of her husband. Sorrow and indignation carried away the impetuous mariner. He proceeded to Versailles, and there, in a crowded gallery, in plain view of all the courtiers, he stepped straight toward the Count of Plouernel, overwhelmed him with bitter reproaches, and forgot himself to the point of exclaiming: "Monsieur, the infamous cynicism of your conduct and your shameless acts of adultery are an outrage to my sister and a flattery to

your master!" This allusion to the amours of Louis XIV was speedily carried to the despot's ears. He flew into a violent rage, and that same day the Count of Plouernel's brother-in-law was taken to the Bastille and thrown into one of its unhealthiest dungeons, where he was left to languish for the space of two years, at the end of which he died. Her brother's imprisonment and death afflicted Madam Plouernel profoundly, and steeped her heart in irreconcilable detestation for Louis XIV. This fresh sorrow increased her domestic infelicity. She divided her time between Bertha's education, study and reading. The library of the castle, established a generation before by Colonel Plouernel, consisted in part of works imbued with the spirit of the political and religious independence of the Reformation. The Countess nourished her mind with the virile substance of those writings. Her favorite books were those which breathed the strictness of morals, the loftiness of thought, the inflexible love of justice, the austerity of honesty that the avowed enemies of the Huguenots themselves give them credit for. Among the books collected by Colonel Plouernel she found an admirable treatise on the druid creed and traditions, "thanks to which the Gauls were freed from the evil of death," inasmuch as they looked upon death as the signal for a complete re-birth towards which the soul winged its way radiant and reclad in a fresh garb. This faith in the immortality of our being, in spirit and matter, the passionate curiosity kindled by the thought of incessant migrations through unknown and mysterious worlds, in short, that creed, so consoling to hearts that are crushed under the weight of present sorrows, soon became the faith of Madam Plouernel, and imparted a powerful impulse to the development of her noble qualities. Brought up in almost complete seclusion by a mother who adored her, and in whom she, in turn, reposed absolute faith, Bertha of Plouernel could not choose but imbibe the maternal convictions and opinions. In what concerned the recent ignoble action of her own family, Bertha's sentiments flowed also from the philosophy of her training. Her aunt and Abbot Boujaron, thrown into consternation by the tidings brought to them by Monsieur Tilly with regard to the popular indignation in The Hague against Louis XIV and the French, remained a prey to distressing apprehensions, while Monsieur Serdan hastened away to the residence of John De Witt, the Grand Pensionary of Holland.

CHAPTER V. JOHN DE WITT

Cornelius and John De Witt were the sons of Jacob De Witt, a citizen illustrious by his patriotism and his learning, and formerly one of the principal leaders of the Lowenstein party. That party, representing as it did the republican traditions of the Low Countries, as contrasted with the military spirit, tended above all to promote the maritime preponderance that the confederation of the United Provinces was entitled to enjoy by reason of her geographic position and the mercantile genius of her population. Accordingly, the Lowenstein party had, for half a century, been opposing the influence of the Orangemen, partisans of the military and hereditary principle of government represented by the Princes of Orange. The hereditary Stadtholdership, coupled with the functions of captain general of the military and naval forces, was in reality a sort of royalty, qualified, it is true, yet dangerous to the people's liberty. Accordingly, the Lowenstein party caused the States General to enact a decree which disqualified the Princes of the house of Orange from holding the Stadtholdership and at the same time the supreme command of the military and naval forces, and provided, furthermore, that the said offices were not to be hereditary. Cornelius De Witt, the elder of the two brothers, was born at Dortrecht in 1623, and, at the age of twenty-three was elected a deputy of his city and *ruart* (inspector general of the dikes) in the district of Putten – an office of great importance in that country where the dikes protect agriculture, and may, at a critical moment, become an important means of defense by being broken down – a redoubtable piece of strategy in the event of a foreign invasion. Cornelius De Witt, a man of antique virtues, and, like his brother, endowed with wide attainments, did not confine himself to affairs of state. Having since earliest boyhood applied his mind to nautical science and become a skilled mariner, he contributed powerfully with his advice during the present war to the successful attack made by the fleet of Holland upon the English port of Chatham, a victory that was at once disastrous and shameful to the British navy. Finally, on the occasion of the naval battle delivered this very year to the British and French fleets by Admiral Ruyter in the roadstead of Solway, Cornelius De Witt, seated in his capacity of commissioner of the admiralty of the Republic, in an ivory chair at the most perilous post, the rear castle of the admiral's ship, faced with heroic calmness the murderous fire poured upon him by the enemy, and thus witnessed impassibly the glorious combat, the plan for which he laid down in concert with Ruyter.

John De Witt, his brother's junior by over two years, excelled Cornelius as a statesman, and equalled him in civic virtues and courage. Elected about 1662 Pensionary of Holland, or the executive agent of the Republic, and thus placed at the head of the government, John De Witt's love for his country assumed a religious character. He looked upon his office as a ministry. Inaccessible by the natural loftiness of his nature to the intoxicating allurements of power, that great man's simplicity and modesty never were belied by his acts; neither did ever his respect for justice, for duty and for pledged faith falter before the pretext of 'necessities of state.' Charged with the diplomatic relations of the United Provinces, he balked the snares, the perfidies and the underground manoeuvres of the foreign ambassadors by the mere rectitude of his character and the penetration of his judgment. One instance among many, in this great citizen's life, may suffice to depict him. He inspired such confidence even in his adversaries, that the Princess of Orange entrusted to him the direction of her son's education, aware though she was of John De Witt's hostility to the hereditary Stadtholdership in the house of Orange. The only descendant of that family, destined to become the head of the Orangemen's party, was thus entrusted by the most enlightened of mothers to the care of John De Witt. He watched over the child with paternal solicitude, endeavoring to attune the youthful soul to sentiments of generosity, to inspire him with a love for the Republic that he was to serve as a citizen, and disclosing to him the misfortunes he would conjure up upon his country if he ever became the instrument of the party that used his name for a flag. Alas! the efforts of John De Witt failed before the consummate dissimulation

of the morose, frail, sickly, nervous lad, who seemed ever to be wrapped in himself, who concealed his ardent aspirations under an impassive exterior, and who, when he arrived at man's estate, was this year to repay John De Witt's paternal kindness with the blackest ingratitude.

The following was the sequence of events: About six weeks before, John De Witt spent a part of the night in considering affairs of state in his cabinet at the palace of the States General. Towards two o'clock in the morning he left for home, preceded by a valet bearing a torch. Unexpectedly a band of men, armed with swords and knives, leaped from ambush and fell upon him. He received a saber cut over the neck; although unarmed he struggled bravely and received three more wounds, the last of which was so serious that he fell down upon the pavement. Believing him dead the assassins took to their heels. De Witt succeeded in rising to his feet and reaching his residence. The assassins were four in number – the two brothers Van der Graeff, Adolf Borrebugh, the Post Office Commissioner of Maestricht, and Cornelius De Bruyn, an officer in The Hague militia. Only one of the two Van der Graeff brothers could be arrested. The other brother and his two accomplices succeeded in fleeing to a place of safety – the camp of the young William of Orange, who was appointed commandant of the land forces when the war broke out against France and England. The Prince was summoned to deliver the murderous assailants of John De Witt. He refused.

From that moment suspicions of William of Orange's complicity in the crime gathered against him. Only he and his party had an interest in the death of John De Witt, who, notwithstanding the disorder that the government was thrown into by the misfortunes of the war, was striving to avert the dangers with which the Prince of Orange threatened the Republic from within, while Louis XIV was attacking it from without. But it was not enough for the Orangemen to have armed assassins against John De Witt; his brother – Cornelius De Witt, the *ruart* of Putten – was also to be disposed of. A horrible scheme was concocted.

Notwithstanding his high office of Grand Pensionary of Holland, John De Witt, a modest man in his tastes, lived with the utmost simplicity, seeking in the company of his wife and his two daughters Agnes and Mary sweet distractions from the cares that weigh upon a statesman. At the period of this narrative he was close to his forty-eighth year. His tall stature, his kind yet grave face, his thoughtful mien, imparted to him an imposing appearance. On this occasion he was writing, alone in his cabinet, a spacious room the walls of which were concealed behind long shelves loaded with books. Above the mantelpiece hung the picture of the father of the two De Witts – an austere face, painted after the manner of Rembrandt. A table, heaped up with papers, stood in the embrasure of a tall window with little square panes of glass held in a lozenge-work of lead, on either side of which were shelves with instruments of physics; for the Grand Pensionary was, like his brother, a lover of the sciences.

Seated at the table, pensive and sad, John De Witt was writing to his friend, Admiral Ruyter, the following remarkable letter that bore the stamp of antique simplicity, and in which the plot, concocted by the Orangemen against Cornelius De Witt, was unveiled:

TO ADMIRAL RUYTER:

My dear Sir and good friend: – I have received the letter that you did me the honor of writing on the 25th of last month to express to me your deep sorrow at the wounds that I received. Thanks to God, I am now almost completely healed: Three of the wounds are closed; the fourth, and most painful of all, is on the way to be likewise closed. The envy with which certain malignant people pursue our family has reached such extremes in these unhappy days, that, after attempting to rid themselves of me by assassination, they are now seeking to rid themselves of my brother, the *ruart* of Putten, through legal process. You will surely have learned that the fiscal attorney has caused him to be arrested by order of the States of Holland, and had him brought here, where he is at present under arrest at the castle. We could not at first surmise the cause, or at least the pretext, for his imprisonment. To-day we know the plot that has been concocted against my brother. It is this: A surgeon named William Tichelaar accused my brother with unheard of brazenness and impudence of having endeavored to corrupt him with a large sum of money to assassinate the Prince of Orange! My

brother, being incapable of conceiving so execrable a scheme, and less still of executing it, I am firmly convinced that, seeing it pleased God to deliver me, as if by a miracle, from the murderous hands that sought to assassinate me, He will not allow innocence to fall a victim to slander and calumny. My brother will doubtlessly escape the snares that are spread against him, as I escaped the daggers of my implacable enemies.

Tichelaar, the informer against my brother, was a short time ago summoned by him, in his capacity of *ruart* of Putten, before the court of that district to answer the charge of attempted rape. Tichelaar was convicted and a sentence was pronounced fastening upon him the stain of moral turpitude. That man, now branded with infamy, sought to revenge himself against my brother by a horrible calumny. Furthermore, we know from reliable sources the following details: Three weeks ago Tichelaar went to my brother's house at Dortrecht, and requested a private interview with him. My sister-in-law, his wife, having opened the door to the man and admitted him to the house, but fearing (after what had happened to me) that he might have evil designs against the *ruart*, ordered one of the servants to keep near the door of the room, and to be on the alert, should Tichelaar attempt violence against my brother. The servant testified under oath before the court commissioner that having been posted near the door, he heard Tichelaar offer to reveal certain secrets to the *ruart*, to which my brother, knowing Tichelaar for a dishonorable character, answered:

"If what you have to say is something proper, I shall be ready to hear you and give you help; if, however, it is something improper, do not mention it to me; it would be better for you, because I would immediately notify the regency or the court."

The servant further testified that thereupon several words were exchanged, and Tichelaar closed the interview saying:

"Seeing that monsieur does not wish me to reveal my secret to him, I shall keep it for the present, and shall later disclose it to others."

My brother has confirmed the deposition, and Tichelaar's testimony being the only one against my brother, I can not see that there is room to apprehend aught in this affair. I do not doubt that he will be soon set free. There is nothing left to regret but the disturbed condition of the times and the wickedness of our enemies.

For the rest, the capture of the cities situated along the Rhine; the swiftness of the motions of the armies of Louis XIV; their invasion of our territory up the Yssel – all this without hardly meeting any resistance, in fact encouraged by unheard of cowardice, or even infamous treason, have more and more brought home to me the truth of what used to be said of old of the Roman Republic —*Prospera omnes sibi vindicant, adversa uni imputantur*.¹ That is what I am now experiencing. The people of Holland blame me for the disasters and calamities of our Republic, notwithstanding I have never been otherwise than a faithful servant of the country. For these reasons I decided to resign my office of Grand Pensionary. The States had the kindness to grant my request, as you will see from the extract which I forward to you. I have thought it my duty to inform you of my resignation, in order that you may not continue to address me on matters that concern the state, and that you forward all such matters to the Pensionary of Holland and West Friesland, or to his present substitute.

John De Witt was about finishing this letter to Admiral Ruyter when a maid servant entered the room and announced to the ex-Grand Pensionary of Holland that Monsieur Serdan, together with two other persons, asked to speak with him.

"Let him in!" answered John De Witt. "Never more so than at this moment was the company of a friend welcome to me."

Monsieur Serdan and his two companions were brought in. One of the latter was a man of mature age and grey of hair; the other, his son, was the young and bold mariner who saved the brigantine St. Eloi, on board of which was Mademoiselle Bertha of Plouernel, and, a singular

¹ All attribute to themselves the glory of success; reverses they impute to only one.

accident that she was still ignorant of, both men belonged to that old Gallic family of Breton extraction of whom Colonel Plouernel made mention in his manuscript, that Lebreunn family which, successively slave, serf and vassal since the conquest of Clovis, transmitted its own plebeian annals to its descendants from generation to generation.

Salaun Lebreunn and his son Nominoë, who followed close upon the heels of Monsieur Serdan, could neither restrain nor conceal their emotion at the sight of John De Witt, the great citizen whom they admired and venerated even more than before, after they learned from Monsieur Serdan a thousand intimate details concerning the illustrious man.

"My friend," said John De Witt to Serdan after affably responding to the respectful greetings of the two Frenchmen, "these are, I suppose, your two countrymen in behalf of whom you asked me to communicate with the college of the admiralty, in order to obtain a secret order and safe conduct, in the event of their vessel's being boarded by one of our cruisers?"

"Yes, my dear John. As French sailors they have nothing to fear from the royal squadrons. The pass is only to protect them from the cruisers of Holland. When day before yesterday I handed you the notes concerning Brittany, confided to me by Monsieur Salaun Lebreunn, the captain of a French merchant vessel and resident of the port of Vannes, I informed you under what circumstances I became acquainted with Monsieur Lebreunn at Nantes, three years ago. Identity of views, religion and hopes bound us together since then. A frequent exchange of letters drew us still closer together. Monsieur Lebreunn, better than anyone else, is qualified to speak upon conditions in Brittany. Both his family and his mercantile connections enable him to be aware of and to apprise me of the evidences of discontent in his province, analogous to those that my friend and I observed when we crossed Languedoc, Dauphiny, the Vivarais, Guyenne and Normandy. Struck with the significance of the tide of popular discontent invading the larger part of France, I induced Monsieur Lebreunn to come to The Hague in order to confer with you, and I placed in your hands his report of the grave events of which Brittany is just now the theater. I need not add that you may place perfect reliance upon all he says."

"I doubt not. It agrees at all points with other reports that have reached me concerning the political situation in France," answered John De Witt.

And addressing himself to Salaun Lebreunn:

"Yes, monsieur, I have read your report with close and scrupulous attention. The distressing and often horrible facts in which it abounds are, I am sure, in no way exaggerated. The acts of pillage, of rapine and numerous other unheard-of atrocities which the troops of Louis XIV are at this hour committing in our own provinces, attest but too clearly the violent and disorderly habits that your armed forces have contracted at home. In short, monsieur, your report proves to me incontestably that the popular discontent, the progress of which is so glaring in Brittany, is to be attributed to the following causes: to the taxes, the imposts and the levies raised upon their vassals by the seigneurs and the clergy; to the ill-treatment, the imprisonment and even the executions mercilessly inflicted upon the vassals, and against which these have no redress, seeing that a large number of seigneurs are vested with supreme powers in their own domains; – to the exactions, the unbridled licence of the seigniorial soldiery, to which the people of the cities and the country are alike exposed; – to the profound irritation of the bourgeoisie of such large cities as Rennes and Nantes, who, whelmed every day with new imposts, find themselves threatened with imminent ruin; – finally, to the no less profound irritation of the Breton parliament, which feels itself outraged by the promulgation, without its sanction, of fiscal edicts which it refuses to register, and which are so burdensome that poverty, distress and misery weigh down upon all classes in the province. Such, monsieur, is the succinct summary of your report, which is supported with facts that are painfully real. You add – do you not? – that, according to your own observations, the discontent brought on by the despotism of Louis XIV has reached such a point that a general uprising is imminent, and may break out at any moment?"

"Yes, monsieur," answered Salaun Lebreunn; "that is my conviction, which rests upon a careful study of the people and of affairs."

"Your conclusion seems to me well founded. And yet," observed John De Witt, "allow me to remind you that at such serious junctures one must always be on his guard against illusions – illusions that are all the more excusable, and therefore all the more liable to mislead us, seeing they are born of generous hopes, of the legitimate desire to put an end to crying abuses."

"You may be certain, monsieur, my wishes do not carry away my judgment," answered Salaun Lebreun. "The present state of public opinion in Brittany does offer to our common cause and that of humanity strong chances of success. But I am far from being blind to many an unfavorable possibility in the event of the impending uprising. Nevertheless, it has seemed to me opportune to profit by the state of general discontent, and, even if we may not succeed in overthrowing, at any rate seek to check the tyranny which is exhausting the energies of France, is degrading and oppressing the land, and reaches beyond our own borders, inflicting painful blows upon your own Republic, our natural ally. The times are once more proving that, seeing Kings, without consulting their peoples, declare war upon whoever interferes with their ambition, or wounds their pride, the people, in their turn, have the right to ally themselves with those who will aid them to break the yoke. Is not that your opinion also, monsieur?"

"Yes, indeed," replied John De Witt; "all oppressed peoples have the right, in the name of eternal justice, to ask for help and support from a friendly people against tyranny. To revolt against Kings and to look for foreign support is a legitimate act, provided that the support do not hide either on the part of those who accord, or those who receive it, any project hostile to the integrity of the territory, or the independence, or the honor of the country. It must be in the interest of the freedom of all."

"Yes; and for that reason eternal shame fastens upon the League!" exclaimed Serdan. "The Catholic League in France sought for Spanish support in order to exterminate the Protestants, and dethrone Henry IV, who, his vices and deplorable defects notwithstanding, at least represented the French nationality."

"While the League, the Catholic Union, on the contrary, represented the foreigner, the party of Rome, of Spain and of the Inquisition," added Salaun Lebreun. "In its hatred of the Protestants and of the spirit of liberty, the League aimed at a crushing despotism that was to be exercised in the interest of its own members. Did they not nurse the parricidal thought of dismembering France? Did they not scheme to offer the throne to Philip II, that bigoted monarch whose bloody tyranny stupefied the world? All honor to your ancestors, Monsieur De Witt! By dint of their sacred revolt they dealt the first blow to the Spanish monarchy, and they raised, heavily paying therefor with their own blood, this Republic whose existence is now threatened by Louis XIV."

"Your observations are just, monsieur," answered John De Witt. "Yes, to the eternal glory of Protestantism, which is my faith, the Protestants, having been placed outside the pale of common rights and kept in constant dread of death, were driven, in the course of the last century and of this very century also, to ask for help from their coreligionists of other countries, in order to defend their families, their hearths, their faith and their threatened lives. But never was their action stained with any project of aggrandizement at the cost of France! Their request for help always had for its purpose only the triumph of the Reformation and the freedom of all! In short, when, oppressed in mind, when physically trampled upon, when plundered of its property, when deprived of its rights, when persecuted in its faith, a people invokes against its tyrant the help of a friendly and disinterested nation, it is not, then, upon the foreigner that it calls but upon its own brothers in the human family."

"My son," said Salaun Lebreun to Nominoë, "you are still young; we live in evil days; you will no doubt take a part in struggles that are as grievous as any that our ancestors experienced in past ages, during which they were alternately vanquishers and vanquished. Never forget the noble sentiments you have just heard uttered by one of the greatest citizens who can do honor to a republican people. Kings are outside of the pale of the law, outside of common rights!"

"Father," answered Nominoë in a moved and serious voice, "the sentiments I have just heard will forever remain graven in my memory, and likewise will the memory of the illustrious man that I to-day have the honor of seeing. I pledge undying hatred to tyranny and royalty."

And, in response to what appeared to him a movement of embarrassment on the part of John De Witt at the crudity of a praise that seemed exaggerated, the young mariner added:

"Oh, monsieur! Your mind is too lofty, your knowledge of men too sound to mistake for base flattery the sincere enthusiasm that one feels at my age for genius and virtue. If you only knew with what avidity I have listened to our friend, Monsieur Serdan, when he told us of the simplicity of your life, which, for so many years, has been consecrated to the service of the Republic, to the defense of its rights, to the promotion of its power, and to the solidification of its conquered freedom! If you only knew how sweet, how wholesome to the soul is the religious adoration one entertains for great and upright men! how fruitful such admiration is of generous aspirations and brave resolutions! how it redoubles in one the love of justice and the horror for iniquity! Oh, Monsieur De Witt, if my admiration wounds your modesty, allow me at least to express to you my gratitude for the noble thoughts that your words and your presence inspire me with, for the good that you have done to me!" Nominoë uttered these words in a voice tremulous with emotion, and eyes glistening with tears.

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