

Chapter 62

PREPARATIONS FOR BATTLE.

The camp of the new Duke of Brabant was situated on the banks of the Scheldt, and the army, although well disciplined, was agitated by a spirit easy to understand.

Indeed, many Calvinists assisted the duke, not from sympathy for him, but in order to be as disagreeable as possible to Spain and to the Catholics of France and England; they fought rather from self-love than from conviction or devotion, and it was certain that, the campaign once over, they would abandon their leader or impose conditions on him. With regard to these conditions, the duke always gave them to understand that when the time came he should be ready, and was constantly saying, "Henri of Navarre made himself a Catholic, why should not I become a Huguenot?" On the opposite side, on the contrary, there existed a perfect unity of feeling. Antwerp had intended to give entrance to him, at her own time and on her own conditions.

All at once they saw a fleet appear at the mouth of the Scheldt, and they learned that this fleet was brought by the high admiral of France, to aid the Duc d'Anjou, whom they now began to look upon as their enemy. The Calvinists of the duke were little better pleased than the Flemings

at the sight. They were very brave, but very jealous: and they did not wish others to come and clip their laurels, particularly swords which had slain so many Huguenots on the day of the St. Bartholomew. From this proceeded many quarrels, which began on the very evening of their arrival, and continued all the next day.

From their ramparts, the Antwerpians had every day the spectacle of a dozen duels between Catholics and Protestants; and they threw into the river as many dead as a combat might have cost the French. If the siege of Antwerp, like that of Troy, had lasted nine years, the besieged need have done nothing but look at the assailants, who would certainly have destroyed themselves. Francois acted the part of mediator, but not without great difficulty; he had made promises to the Huguenots, and could not offend them without offending at the same time all Flanders. On the other hand, to offend the Catholics sent by the king to aid him would be most impolitic. The arrival of this re-enforcement, on which the duke himself had not reckoned, filled the Spaniards and the Guises with rage. However, all these different opinions interfered sadly with the discipline of the duke's army. Joyeuse, who we know had never liked the mission, was annoyed to find among these men such antagonistic opinions, and felt instinctively that the time for success was past, and both as an idle courtier and as a captain, grumbled at having come so far only to meet with defeat. He declared loudly that the Duc d'Anjou had been wrong in laying siege to Antwerp, and argued that to possess a great city with its own consent was a real advantage; but that to take by assault the second capital of his future states was to expose himself to the dislike of the Flemings; and Joyeuse knew the Flemings too well

not to feel sure that if the duke did take Antwerp, sooner or later they would revenge themselves with usury. This opinion Joyeuse did not hesitate to declare in the duke's tent.

While the council was held among his captains, the duke was lying on a couch and listening, not to the advice of the admiral, but to the whispers of Aurilly. This man, by his cowardly compliances, his base flatteries, and his continual assiduities, had secured the favor of the prince. With his lute, his love messages, and his exact information about all the persons and all the intrigues of the court--with his skillful maneuvers for drawing into the prince's net whatever prey he might wish for, he had made a large fortune, while he remained to all appearance the poor luteplayer. His influence was immense, because it was secret.

Joyeuse, seeing the duke talking to Aurilly, stopped short. The duke, who had, after all, been paying more attention than he seemed to do, asked him what was the matter. "Nothing, monseigneur; I am only waiting until your highness is at liberty to listen to me."

"Oh! but I do listen, M. de Joyeuse. Do you think I cannot listen to two people at once, when Cæsar dictated seven letters at a time?"

"Monseigneur," said Joyeuse, with a glance at the musician, "I am no singer to need an accompaniment when I speak."

"Very good, duke; be quiet, Aurilly. Then you disapprove of a coup de

main on Antwerp?"--"Yes, monseigneur."

"I adopted this plan in council, however."

"Therefore, monseigneur, I speak with much hesitation, after so many distinguished captains."

And Joyeuse, courtier-like, bowed to all. Many voices were instantly raised to agree with the admiral.

"Comte de St. Aignan," said the prince to one of his bravest colonels, "you are not of the opinion of M. de Joyeuse?"

"Yes, monseigneur, I am."

"Oh! I thought as you made a grimace--"

Every one laughed but Joyeuse, who said, "If M. de St. Aignan generally gives his advice in that manner, it is not very polite, that is all."

"M. de Joyeuse," replied St. Aignan, "his highness is wrong to reproach me with an infirmity contracted in his service. At the taking of Cateau-Cambresis I received a blow on the head, and since that time my face is subject to nervous contractions, which occasion those grimaces of which his highness complains. This is not an excuse that I give you, M. de Joyeuse; it is an explanation," said the count, proudly.

"No, monsieur," said Joyeuse, "it is a reproach that you make, and you are right."

The blood mounted to the face of Duc Francois.

"And to whom is this reproach addressed?" said he.

"To me, probably, monseigneur."

"Why should St. Aignan reproach you, whom he does not know?"

"Because I believed for a moment that M. de St. Aignan cared so little for your highness as to counsel you to assault Antwerp."

"But," cried the prince, "I must settle my position in the country. I am Duke of Brabant and Count of Flanders, in name, and I must be so in reality. This William, who is gone I know not where, spoke to me of a kingdom. Where is this kingdom?--in Antwerp. Where is he?--probably in Antwerp also; therefore we must take Antwerp, and we shall know how we stand."

"Oh! monseigneur, you know it now, or you are, in truth, a worse politician than I thought you. Who counseled you to take Antwerp?--the Prince of Orange. Who disappeared at the moment of taking the field?--the Prince of Orange. Who, while he made your highness Duke of Brabant, reserved for himself the lieutenant-generalship of the duchy?--the Prince of Orange. Whose interest is it to ruin the Spaniards

by you, and you by the Spaniards?--the Prince of Orange. Who will replace you, who will succeed, if he does not do so already?--the Prince of Orange? Oh! monseigneur, in following his counsels you have but annoyed the Flemings. Let a reverse come, and all those who do not dare to look you now in the face will run after you like those timid dogs who run after those who fly."

"What! you imagine that I can be beaten by wool-merchants and beer-drinkers?"

"These wool-merchants and these beer-drinkers have given plenty to do to Philippe de Valois, the Emperor Charles V., and Philippe II., who were three princes placed sufficiently high, monseigneur, for the comparison not to be disagreeable to you."

"Then you fear a repulse?"

"Yes, monseigneur, I do."

"You will not be there, M. de Joyeuse."

"Why not?"

"Because you can hardly have such doubts of your own bravery as already to see yourself flying before the Flemings. In any case, reassure yourself, these prudent merchants have the habit, when they march to battle, of cumbering themselves with such heavy armor that they would

never catch you if you did run."

"Monseigneur, I do not doubt my own courage. I shall be in the front, but I shall be beaten there, as the others who are behind will be."

"But your reasoning is not logical, M. de Joyeuse; you approve of my taking the lesser places."

"I approve of your taking those that do not defend themselves."

"And then I am to draw back from the great city because she talks of defending herself?"

"Better than to march on to destruction."

"Well, I will not retreat."

"Your highness must do as you like; and we are here to obey."

"Prove to me that I am wrong."

"Monseigneur, see the army of the Prince of Orange. It was yours, was it not? Well, instead of sitting down before Antwerp with you, it is in Antwerp, which is very different. William, you say, was your friend and counselor; and now you not only do not know where he is, but you believe him to be changed into an enemy. See the Flemings--when you arrived they were pleased to see you; now they shut their gates at your sight, and

prepare their cannon at your approach, not less than if you were the Duc d'Alva. Well! I tell you, Flemings and Dutch, Antwerp and Orange, only wait for an opportunity to unite against you, and that opportunity will be when you order your artillery to fire."

"Well, we will fight at once Flemings and Dutch, Antwerp and Orange."

"No, monseigneur, we have but just men enough to attack Antwerp, supposing we have only the inhabitants to deal with; and while we are engaged in the assault, William will fall on us with his eternal eight or ten thousand men, always destroyed and always reappearing by the aid of which he has kept in check during ten or twelve years the Duc d'Alva, Requesens, and the Duc de Parma."

"Then you persist in thinking that we shall be beaten?"

"I do."

"Well, it is easy for you to avoid it, M. de Joyeuse," said the prince angrily; "my brother sent you here to aid me, but I may dismiss you, saying that I do not need aid."

"Your highness may say so, but I would not retire on the eve of a battle."

"Well, my dear admiral," said the duke, trying to conciliate, "I may have been too jealous of the honor of my name, and wished too much to

prove the superiority of the French army, and I may have been wrong. But the evil is done; we are before armed men--before men who now refuse what they themselves offered. Am I to yield to them? To-morrow they would begin to retake, bit by bit, what I have already conquered. No! the sword is drawn; let us strike, or they will strike first. That is my opinion."

"When your highness speaks thus," said Joyeuse, "I will say no more. I am here to obey you, and will do so with all my heart, whether you lead me to death or victory; and yet--but I will say no more."--"Speak."

"No, I have said enough."

"No, I wish to hear."

"In private then, if it please your highness."

All rose and retired to the other end of the spacious tent.

"Speak," said Francois.

"Monseigneur may care little for a check from Spain, a check which will render triumphant those drinkers of Flemish beer, or this double-faced Prince of Orange; but will you bear so patiently the laughter of M. de Guise?"

Francois frowned.

"What has M. de Guise to do with it?" said he.

"M. de Guise tried to have you assassinated, monseigneur; Salcede confessed it at the torture, and, if I mistake not, he plays a great part in all this, and he will be delighted to see you receive a check before Antwerp, or even perhaps to obtain, for nothing, that death of a son of France, for which he had promised to pay so dearly to Salcede. Read the history of Flanders, monseigneur, and you will see that the Flemings are in the habit of enriching their soil with the blood of princes, and of the best French warriors."

The duke shook his head.

"Well, Joyeuse," said he, "I will give, if it must be, the cursed joy to the Lorraines of seeing me dead, but not that of seeing me flying. I thirst for glory, Joyeuse; for alone of all my name, I have still my battles to win."

"You forget Cateau Cambresis, monseigneur."

"Compare that with Jarnac and Montcontour, Joyeuse." Then, turning to the others, who were standing far off, he said, "Gentlemen, the assault is still resolved on; the rain has ceased, the ground is good, we will make the attack this night." Joyeuse bowed.

"Will your highness give full directions? we wait for them," said he.

"You have eight vessels, without counting the admiral's ship, have you not, M. de Joyeuse?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"You will force the line; the thing will be easy, the Antwerpians have only merchant vessels in the port; then you will bring them to bear upon the fort. Then, if the quay is defended, you will attempt a landing with your 1,500 men. Of the rest of the army I will make two columns: one commanded by M. de St. Aignan, the other by myself. Both will attempt an escalade by surprise, at the moment when the first cannon-shot is fired.

"The cavalry will remain in position, in case of a repulse, to protect the retreating columns. Of these three attacks, one must surely succeed. The first column which gains the ramparts will fire a rocket to let the others know."

"But one must think of everything, monseigneur," said Joyeuse; "and supposing all three attacks should fail?"

"Then we must gain the vessels under the protection of our batteries."

All bowed.

"Now, gentlemen, silence," said the duke; "wake the sleeping troops, and embark; but let not a shot reveal our design. You will be in the port,

admiral, before the Antwerpians suspect your intention. We shall go along the left bank, and shall arrive at the same time as yourself. Go, gentlemen, and good courage; our former good luck will not fail to follow us over the Scheldt."

The captains quitted the prince's tent, and gave their orders with the indicated precautions.