

Chapter 63

MONSEIGNEUR.

However, the Antwerpians did not quietly see the hostile preparations of the Duc d'Anjou, and Joyeuse was not wrong in attributing to them all the enmity possible. Antwerp was like a beehive at night, calm on the exterior, but within full of movement and murmur.

The Flemings in arms patrolled the streets, barricaded their houses, and fraternized with the battalions of the Prince of Orange, of whom part were already in garrison there, while the other part entered the city in fractions.

When all was ready for a vigorous defense, the Prince of Orange, on a dark and moonless night, entered the city quietly, and went to the Hotel de Ville, where his confidants had everything ready for his reception. There he received all the deputies of the bourgeoisie, passed in review the officers of the paid troops, and communicated his plans to them, the chief of which was to profit by this movement of the Duc d'Anjou to break with him. The duke had done just what William wished to bring him to, and he saw with pleasure this new competitor for the sovereignty ruin himself, like so many others.

William would have taken the offensive, but the governor objected, and determined to wait for the arrival of monseigneur.

Nine o'clock in the evening sounded, and the uncertainty became real anxiety, some scouts having protested that they had seen a movement in the French camp. A little flat boat had been sent on the Scheldt to reconnoiter, for the Antwerpians were less unquiet as to what would occur by land than by sea; but the bark had not returned. William became more and more impatient, when the door of the hall opened, and a valet appeared and announced "Monseigneur." As he spoke, a man, tall and imperious-looking, wearing with supreme grace the cloak which entirely enveloped him, entered the hall, and saluted courteously those who were there. But at the first glance, his eye, proud and piercing, sought out the prince in the midst of his officers.

He went straight up to him and offered him his hand, which the prince pressed with affection, and almost with respect.

They called each other "Monseigneur." After this the unknown took off his cloak. He was dressed in a buff doublet, and had high leather boots; he was armed with a long sword, which seemed to make part of himself, so easily it hung, and with a little dagger, which was passed through his belt. His boots were covered with mud and dust, and his spurs were red with the blood of his horse. He took his place at the table.

"Well, where are we?" asked he.

"Monseigneur," replied William, "you must have seen, in coming here, that the streets were barricaded."

"I saw that."

"And the houses loopholed?"

"I did not see that; but it is a good plan."

"And the sentries doubled?"

"Does not monseigneur approve of these preparations for defense?" said a voice, in a tone of anxious disappointment.

"Yes; but, however, I do not believe that in our circumstances it will be useful; it fatigues the soldier and disquiets the bourgeois. You have a plan of attack and defense, I suppose?"

"We waited to communicate them to monseigneur," said the burgomaster.

"Speak then."

"Monseigneur arrived rather late, and I was obliged to act meanwhile," said William.

"And you did right, monseigneur; besides, whatever you do, you do well. But I have not lost my time on the road, either."

"We know by our spies," said the burgomaster, "that a movement is

preparing in the French camp; they are making ready for an attack, but as we do not know on which side it will come, we have disposed the guns so that they may be equally distributed over the whole rampart."

"That is wise," replied the unknown, with a slight smile to William, who held his tongue, and let the bourgeois speak of war.

"We have done the same with our civic guards; they are spread over the whole wall, and have orders to run at once to the point of attack.

However, it is the opinion of the greater number of our members that it is impossible that the French meditate anything but a feigned attack."

"And what purpose would that serve?"

"To intimidate us, and induce us to admit them amicably."

The stranger looked again at the Prince of Orange, who listened to all this in the most careless manner, which almost amounted to disdain.

"However," said another voice, "some fancied they could distinguish preparations for attack in the camp this evening."

"Mere suspicions," said the burgomaster; "I examined the camp myself with an excellent spy-glass. The men were preparing for sleep, and the duke was dining in his tent."

The unknown threw a new glance at the prince, and fancied that this time

he gave a slight smile.

"Gentlemen," said the unknown, "you are in error; a regular assault is preparing against you, and your plans, however good, are incomplete."

"But, monseigneur--"

"Incomplete in this, that you expect an attack, and have prepared to meet it."

"Certainly."

"Well, it is you who will make the attack, not wait for it, if you will trust to me."--"Ah!" cried William, "that is something like speaking."

"At this moment," said the stranger, who saw that he might reckon on the prince's support, "the ships of M. de Joyeuse are getting ready."

"How do you know that, monseigneur?" cried many voices together.

"I know it," replied he.

A murmur of doubt was half uttered, but the stranger caught it.

"Do you doubt it?" asked he, in the tone of a man accustomed to control all fears, prejudices, and self-loves.

"We do not doubt it if your highness says it; but if you will permit us to observe--"

"Speak."

"That if it were so we should have had tidings of it."

"How so?"--"By our spies."