CHAPTER X

ADRIAN GOES OUT HAWKING

In a house down a back street not very far from the Leyden prison, a man and a woman sat at breakfast on the morning following the burning of the Heer Jansen and his fellow martyr. These also we have met before, for they were none other than the estimable Black Meg and her companion, named the Butcher. Time, which had left them both strong and active, had not, it must be admitted, improved their personal appearance. Black Meg, indeed, was much as she had always been, except that her hair was now grey and her features, which seemed to be covered with yellow parchment, had become sharp and haglike, though her dark eyes still burned with their ancient fire. The man, Hague Simon, or the Butcher, scoundrel by nature and spy and thief by trade, one of the evil spawn of an age of violence and cruelty, boasted a face and form that became his reputation well. His countenance was villainous, very fat and flabby, with small, pig-like eyes, and framed, as it were, in a fringe of sandy-coloured whiskers, running from the throat to the temple, where they faded away into a great expanse of utterly bald head. The figure beneath was heavy, pot-haunched, and supported upon a pair of bowed but sturdy legs.

But if they were no longer young, and such good looks as they ever possessed had vanished, the years had brought them certain compensations. Indeed, it was a period in which spies and all such wretches flourished, since, besides other pickings, by special enactment

a good proportion of the realized estates of heretics was paid over to the informers as blood-money. Of course, however, humble tools like the Butcher and his wife did not get the largest joints of the heretic sheep, for whenever one was slaughtered, there were always many honest middlemen of various degree to be satisfied, from the judge down to the executioner, with others who never showed their faces.

Still, when the burnings and torturings were brisk, the amount totalled up very handsomely. Thus, as the pair sat at their meal this morning, they were engaged in figuring out what they might expect to receive from the estate of the late Heer Jansen, or at least Black Meg was so employed with the help of a deal board and a bit of chalk. At last she announced the result, which was satisfactory. Simon held up his fat hands in admiration.

"Clever little dove," he said, "you ought to have been a lawyer's wife with your head for figures. Ah! it grows near, it grows near."

"What grows near, you fool?" asked Meg in her deep mannish voice.

"That farm with an inn attached of which I dream, standing in rich pasture land with a little wood behind it, and in the wood a church. Not too large; no, I am not ambitious; let us say a hundred acres, enough to keep thirty or forty cows, which you would milk while I marketed the butter and the cheeses----"

"And slit the throats of the guests," interpolated Meg.

Simon looked shocked. "No, wife, you misjudge me. It is a rough world, and we must take queer cuts to fortune, but once I get there, respectability for me and a seat in the village church, provided, of course, that it is orthodox. I know that you come of the people, and your instincts are of the people, but I can never forget that my grandfather was a gentleman," and Simon puffed himself out and looked at the ceiling.

"Indeed," sneered Meg, "and what was your grandmother, or, for the matter of that, how do you know who was your grandfather? Country house! The old Red Mill, where you hide goods out there in the swamp, is likely to be your only country house. Village church? Village gallows more likely. No, don't you look nasty at me, for I won't stand it, you dirty little liar. I have done things, I know; but I wouldn't have got my own aunt burned for an Anabaptist, which she wasn't, in order to earn twenty florins, so there."

Simon turned purple with rage; that aunt story was one which touched him on the raw. "Ugly----" he began.

Instantly Meg's hand shot out and grasped the neck of a bottle, whereon he changed his tune.

"The sex, the sex!" he murmured, turning aside to mop his bald head with

a napkin; "well, it's only their pretty way, they will have their little joke. Hullo, there is someone knocking at the door."

"And mind how you open it," said Meg, becoming alert. "Remember we have plenty of enemies, and a pike blade comes through a small crack."

"Can you live with the wise and remain a greenhorn? Trust me." And placing his arm about his spouse's waist, Simon stood on tiptoe and kissed her gently on the cheek in token of reconciliation, for Meg had a nasty memory in quarrels. Then he skipped away towards the door as fast as his bandy legs would carry him.

The colloquy there was long and for the most part carried on through the keyhole, but in the end their visitor was admitted, a beetle-browed brute of much the same stamp as his host.

"You are nice ones," he said sulkily, "to be so suspicious about an old friend, especially when he comes on a job."

"Don't be angry, dear Hans," interrupted Simon in a pleading voice. "You know how many bad characters are abroad in these rough times; why, for aught we could tell, you might have been one of these desperate Lutherans, who stick at nothing. But about the business?"

"Lutherans, indeed," snarled Hans; "well, if they are wise they'd stick at your fat stomach; but it is a Lutheran job that I have come from The

Hague to talk about."

"Ah!" said Meg, "who sent you?"

"A Spaniard named Ramiro, who has recently turned up there, a humorous dog connected with the Inquisition, who seems to know everybody and whom nobody knows. However, his money is right enough, and no doubt he has authority behind him. He says that you are old friends of his."

"Ramiro? Ramiro?" repeated Meg reflectively, "that means Oarsman, doesn't it, and sounds like an alias? Well, I've lots of acquaintances in the galleys, and he may be one of them. What does he want, and what are the terms?"

Hans leant forward and whispered for a long while. The other two listened in silence, only nodding from time to time.

"It doesn't seem much for the job," said Simon when Hans had finished.

"Well, friend, it is easy and safe; a fat merchant and his wife and a young girl. Mind you, there is no killing to be done if we can help it, and if we can't help it the Holy Office will shield us. Also it is only the letter which he thinks that the young woman may carry that the noble Ramiro wants. Doubtless it has to do with the sacred affairs of the Church. Any valuables about them we may keep as a perquisite over and

above the pay."

Simon hesitated, but Meg announced with decision,

"It is good enough; these merchant woman generally have jewels hidden in their stays."

"My dear," interrupted Simon.

"Don't 'my dear' me," said Meg fiercely. "I have made up my mind, so there's an end. We meet by the Boshhuysen at five o'clock at the big oak in the copse, where we will settle the details."

After this Simon said no more, for he had this virtue, so useful in domestic life--he knew when to yield.

On this same morning Adrian rose late. The talk at the supper table on the previous night, especially Foy's coarse, uneducated sarcasm, had ruffled his temper, and when Adrian's temper was ruffled he generally found it necessary to sleep himself into good humour. As the bookkeeper of the establishment, for his stepfather had never been able to induce him to take an active part in its work, which in his heart he considered beneath him, Adrian should have been in the office by nine o'clock. Not having risen before ten, however, nor eaten his breakfast until after

eleven, this was clearly impossible. Then he remembered that here was a good chance of finishing a sonnet, of which the last lines were running in his head. It chanced that Adrian was a bit of a poet, and, like most poets, he found quiet essential to the art of composition. Somehow, when Foy was in the house, singing and talking, and that great Frisian brute, Martin, was tramping to and fro, there was never any quiet, for even when he could not hear them, the sense of their presence exasperated his nerves. So now was his opportunity, especially as his mother was out--marketing, she said--but in all probability engaged upon some wretched and risky business connected with the people whom she called martyrs. Adrian determined to avail himself of it and finish his sonnet.

This took some time. First, as all true artists know, the Muse must be summoned, and she will rarely arrive under an hour's appropriate and gloomy contemplation of things in general. Then, especially in the case of sonnets, rhymes, which are stubborn and remorseless things, must be found and arranged. The pivot and object of this particular poem was a certain notable Spanish beauty, Isabella d'Ovanda by name. She was the wife of a decrepit but exceedingly noble Spaniard, who might almost have been her grandfather, and who had been sent as one of a commission appointed by King Philip II. to inquire into certain financial matters connected with the Netherlands.

This grandee, who, as it happened, was a very industrious and conscientious person, among other cities, had visited Leyden in order to assess the value of the Imperial dues and taxes. The task did not take

him long, because the burghers rudely and vehemently declared that under their ancient charter they were free from any Imperial dues or taxes whatsoever, nor could the noble marquis's arguments move them to a more rational view. Still, he argued for a week, and during that time his wife, the lovely Isabella, dazzled the women of the town with her costumes and the men with her exceedingly attractive person.

Especially did she dazzle the romantic Adrian; hence the poetry. On the whole the rhymes went pretty well, though there were difficulties, but with industry he got round them. Finally the sonnet, a high-flown and very absurd composition, was completed.

By now it was time to eat; indeed, there are few things that make a man hungrier than long-continued poetical exercise, so Adrian ate. In the midst of the meal his mother returned, pale and anxious-faced, for the poor woman had been engaged in making arrangements for the safety of the beggared widow of the martyred Jansen, a pathetic and even a dangerous task. In his own way Adrian was fond of his mother, but being a selfish puppy he took but little note of her cares or moods. Therefore, seizing the opportunity of an audience he insisted upon reading to her his sonnet, not once but several times.

"Very pretty, my son, very pretty," murmured Lysbeth, through whose bewildered brain the stilted and meaningless words buzzed like bees in an empty hive, "though I am sure I cannot guess how you find the heart in such times as these to write poetry to fine ladies whom you do not

know."

"Poetry, mother," said Adrian sententiously, "is a great consoler; it lifts the mind from the contemplation of petty and sordid cares."

"Petty and sordid cares!" repeated Lysbeth wonderingly, then she added with a kind of cry: "Oh! Adrian, have you no heart that you can watch a saint burn and come home to philosophise about his agonies? Will you never understand? If you could have seen that poor woman this morning who only three months ago was a happy bride." Then bursting into tears Lysbeth turned and fled from the room, for she remembered that what was the fate of the Vrouw Jansen to-day to-morrow might be her own.

This show of emotion quite upset Adrian whose nerves were delicate, and who being honestly attached to his mother did not like to see her weeping.

"Pest on the whole thing," he thought to himself, "why can't we go away and live in some pleasant place where they haven't got any religion, unless it is the worship of Venus? Yes, a place of orange groves, and running streams, and pretty women with guitars, who like having sonnets read to them, and----"

At this moment the door opened and Martin's huge and flaming poll appeared.

"The master wants to know if you are coming to the works, Heer Adrian, and if not will you be so good as to give me the key of the strong-box as he needs the cash book."

With a groan Adrian rose to go, then changed his mind. No, after that perfumed vision of green groves and lovely ladies it was impossible for him to face the malodorous and prosaic foundry.

"Tell them I can't come," he said, drawing the key from his pocket.

"Very good, Heer Adrian, why not?"

"Because I am writing."

"Writing what?" queried Martin.

"A sonnet."

"What's a sonnet?" asked Martin blankly.

"Ill-educated clown," murmured Adrian, then--with a sudden inspiration, "I'll show you what a sonnet is; I will read it to you. Come in and shut the door." Martin obeyed, and was duly rewarded with the sonnet, of which he understood nothing at all except the name of the lady, Isabella d'Ovanda. But Martin was not without the guile of the serpent.

"Beautiful," he said, "beautiful! Read it again, master."

Adrian did so with much delight, remembering the tale of how the music of Orpheus had charmed the very beasts.

"Ah!" said Martin, "that's a love-letter, isn't it, to that splendid, black-eyed marchioness, whom I saw looking at you?"

"Well, not exactly," said Adrian, highly pleased, although to tell the truth he could not recollect upon what occasion the fair Isabella had favoured him with her kind glances. "Yet I suppose that you might call it so, an idealised love-letter, a letter in which ardent and distant yet tender admiration is wrapt with the veil of verse."

"Quite so. Well, Master Adrian, just you send it to her."

"You don't think that she might be offended?" queried Adrian doubtfully.

"Offended!" said Martin, "if she is I know nothing of women" (as a matter of fact he didn't.) "No, she will be very pleased; she'll take it away and read it by herself, and sleep with it under her pillow until she knows it by heart, and then I daresay she will ask you to come and see her. Well, I must be off, but thank you for reading me the beautiful poetry letter, Heer Adrian."

"Really," reflected Adrian, as the door closed behind him, "this is

another instance of the deceitfulness of appearances. I always thought Martin a great, brutal fool, yet in his breast, uncultured as it is, the sacred spark still smoulders." And then and there he made up his mind that he would read Martin a further selection of poems upon the first opportunity.

If only Adrian could have been a witness to the scene which at that very moment was in progress at the works! Martin having delivered the key of the box, sought out Foy, and proceeded to tell him the story. More, perfidious one, he handed over a rough draft of the sonnet which he had surreptitiously garnered from the floor, to Foy, who, clad in a leather apron, and seated on the edge of a casting, read it eagerly.

"I told him to send it," went on Martin, "and, by St. Peter, I think he will, and then if he doesn't have old Don Diaz after him with a pistol in one hand and a stiletto in the other, my name isn't Martin Roos."

"Of course, of course," gasped Foy, kicking his legs into the air with delight, "why, they call the old fellow 'Singe jaloux.' Oh! it's capital, and I only hope that he opens the lady's letters."

Thus did Foy, the commonplace and practical, make a mock of the poetic efforts of the high-souled and sentimental Adrian.

Meanwhile Adrian, feeling that he required air after his literary labours, fetched his peregrine from its perch--for he was fond of

hawking--and, setting it on his wrist, started out to find a quarry on the marshes near the town.

Before he was halfway down the street he had forgotten all about the sonnet and the lovely Isabella. His was a curious temperament, and this sentimentality, born of vainness and idle hours, by no means expressed it all. That he was what we should nowadays call a prig we know, and also that he possessed his father's, Montalvo's, readiness of speech without his father's sense of humour. In him, as Martin had hinted, the strain of the sire predominated, for in all essentials Adrian was as Spanish in mind as in appearance.

For instance, the sudden and violent passions into which he was apt to fall if thwarted or overlooked were purely Spanish; there seemed to be nothing of the patient, phlegmatic Netherlander about this side of him. Indeed it was this temper of his perhaps more than any other desire or tendency that made him so dangerous, for, whereas the impulses of his heart were often good enough, they were always liable to be perverted by some access of suddenly provoked rage.

From his birth up Adrian had mixed little with Spaniards, and every influence about him, especially that of his mother, the being whom he most loved on earth, had been anti-Spanish, yet were he an hidalgo fresh from the Court at the Escurial, he could scarcely have been more Castilian. Thus he had been brought up in what might be called a Republican atmosphere, yet he was without sympathy for the love of

liberty which animated the people of Holland. The sturdy independence of the Netherlanders, their perpetual criticism of kings and established rules, their vulgar and unheard-of assumption that the good things of the world were free to all honest and hard-working citizens, and not merely the birthright of blue blood, did not appeal to Adrian. Also from childhood he had been a member of the dissenting Church, one of the New Religion. Yet, at heart, he rejected this faith with its humble professors and pastors, its simple, and sometimes squalid rites; its long and earnest prayers offered to the Almighty in the damp of a cellar or the reek of a cowhouse.

Like thousands of his Spanish fellow-countrymen, he was constitutionally unable to appreciate the fact that true religion and true faith are the natural fruits of penitence and effort, and that individual repentance and striving are the only sacrifices required of man.

For safety's sake, like most politic Netherlanders, Adrian was called upon from time to time to attend worship in the Catholic churches. He did not find the obligation irksome. In fact, the forms and rites of that stately ceremonial, the moving picture of the Mass in those dim aisles, the pealing of the music and the sweet voices of hidden choristers--all these things unsealed a fountain in his bosom and at whiles moved him well nigh to tears. The system appealed to him also, and he could understand that in it were joy and comfort. For here was to be found forgiveness of sins, not far off in the heavens, but at hand upon the earth; forgiveness to all who bent the head and paid the fee.

Here, ready made by that prince of armourers, a Church that claimed to be directly inspired, was a harness of proof which, after the death he dreaded (for he was full of spiritual fears and superstitions), would suffice to turn the shafts of Satan from his poor shivering soul, however steeped in crime. Was not this a more serviceable and practical faith than that of these loud-voiced, rude-handed Lutherans among whom he lived; men who elected to cast aside this armour and trust instead to a buckler forged by their faith and prayers--yes, and to give up their evil ways and subdue their own desires that they might forge it better?

Such were the thoughts of Adrian's secret heart, but as yet he had never acted on them, since, however much he might wish to do so, he had not found the courage to break away from the influence of his surroundings. His surroundings--ah! how he hated them! How he hated them! For very shame's sake, indeed, he could not live in complete idleness among folk who were always busy, therefore he acted as accountant in his stepfather's business, keeping the books of the foundry in a scanty and inefficient fashion, or writing letters to distant customers, for he was a skilled clerk, to order the raw materials necessary to the craft. But of this occupation he was weary, for he had the true Spanish dislike and contempt of trade. In his heart he held that war was the only occupation worthy of a man, successful war, of course, against foes worth plundering, such as Cortes and Pizarro had waged upon the poor Indians of New Spain.

Adrian had read a chronicle of the adventures of these heroes, and

bitterly regretted that he had come into the world too late to share them. The tale of heathen foemen slaughtered by thousands, and of the incalculable golden treasures divided among their conquerors, fired his imagination--especially the treasures. At times he would see them in his sleep, baskets full of gems, heaps of barbaric gold and guerdon of fair women slaves, all given by heaven to the true soldier whom it had charged with the sacred work of Christianising unbelievers by means of massacre and the rack.

Oh! how deeply did he desire such wealth and the power which it would bring with it; he who was dependent upon others that looked down upon him as a lazy dreamer, who had never a guilder to spare in his pouch, who had nothing indeed but more debts than he cared to remember. But it never occurred to him to set to work and grow rich like his neighbours by honest toil and commerce. No, that was the task of slaves, like these low Hollander fellows among whom his lot was cast.

Such were the main characteristics of Adrian, surnamed van Goorl; Adrian the superstitious but unspiritual dreamer, the vain Sybarite, the dull poet, the chopper of false logic, the weak and passionate self-seeker, whose best and deepest cravings, such as his love for his mother and another love that shall be told of, were really little more than a reflection of his own pride and lusts, or at least could be subordinated to their fulfilment. Not that he was altogether bad; somewhere in him there was a better part. Thus: he was capable of good purposes and of bitter remorse; under certain circumstances even he might become capable

also of a certain spurious spiritual exaltation. But if this was to bloom in his heart, it must be in a prison strong enough to protect from the blows of temptation. Adrian tempted would always be Adrian overcome. He was fashioned by nature to be the tool of others or of his own desires.

It may be asked what part had his mother in him; where in his weak ignoble nature was the trace of her pure and noble character? It seems hard to find. Was this want to be accounted for by the circumstances connected with his birth, in which she had been so unwilling an agent? Had she given him something of her body but naught of that which was within her own control--her spirit? Who can say? This at least is true, that from his mother's stock he had derived nothing beyond a certain Dutch doggedness of purpose which, when added to his other qualities, might in some events make him formidable--a thing to fear and flee from.

Adrian reached the Witte Poort, and paused on this side of the moat to reflect about things in general. Like most young men of his time and blood, as has been said, he had military leanings, and was convinced that, given the opportunity, he might become one of the foremost generals of his age. Now he was engaged in imagining himself besieging Leyden at the head of a great army, and in fancy disposing his forces after such fashion as would bring about its fall in the shortest possible time. Little did he guess that within some few years this very

question was to exercise the brain of Valdez and other great Spanish captains.

Whilst he was thus occupied suddenly a rude voice called,

"Wake up, Spaniard," and a hard object--it was a green apple--struck him on his flat cap nearly knocking out the feather. Adrian leaped round with an oath, to catch sight of two lads, louts of about fifteen, projecting their tongues and jeering at him from behind the angles of the gate-house. Now Adrian was not popular with the youth of Leyden, and he knew it well. So, thinking it wisest to take no notice of this affront, he was about to continue on his way when one of the youths, made bold by impunity, stepped from his corner and bowed before him till the ragged cap in his hand touched the dust, saying, in a mocking voice,

"Hans, why do you disturb the noble hidalgo? Cannot you see that the noble hidalgo is going for a walk in the country to look for his most high father, the honourable duke of the Golden Fleece, to whom he is taking a cockolly bird as a present?"

Adrian heard and winced at the sting of the insult, as a high-bred horse winces beneath the lash. Of a sudden rage boiled in his veins like a fountain of fire, and drawing the dagger from his girdle, he rushed at the boys, dragging the hooded hawk, which had become dislodged from his wrist, fluttering through the air after him. At that moment, indeed, he would have been capable of killing one or both of them if he could have

caught them, but, fortunately for himself and them, being prepared for an onslaught, they vanished this way and that up the narrow lanes. Presently he stopped, and, still shaking with wrath, replaced the hawk on his wrist and walked across the bridge.

"They shall pay for it," he muttered. "Oh! I will not forget, I will not forget."

Here it may be explained that of the story of his birth Adrian had heard something, but not all. He knew, for instance, that his father's name was Montalvo, that the marriage with his mother for some reason was declared to be illegal, and that this Montalvo had left the Netherlands under a cloud to find his death, so he had been told, abroad. More than this Adrian did not know for certain, since everybody showed a singular reticence in speaking to him of the matter. Twice he had plucked up courage to question his mother on the subject, and on each occasion her face had turned cold and hard as stone, and she answered almost in the same words:

"Son, I beg you to be silent. When I am dead you will find all the story of your birth written down, but if you are wise you will not read."

Once he had asked the same question of his stepfather, Dirk van Goorl, whereupon Dirk looked ill at ease and answered:

"Take my advice, lad, and be content to know that you are here and

alive with friends to take care of you. Remember that those who dig in churchyards find bones."

"Indeed," replied Adrian haughtily; "at least I trust that there is nothing against my mother's reputation."

At these words, to his surprise, Dirk suddenly turned pale as a sheet and stepped towards him as though he were about to fly at his throat.

"You dare to doubt your mother," he began, "that angel out of Heaven--" then ceased and added presently, "Go! I beg your pardon; I should have remembered that you at least are innocent, and it is but natural that the matter weighs upon your mind."

So Adrian went, also that proverb about churchyards and bones made such an impression on him that he did no more digging. In other words he ceased to ask questions, trying to console his mind with the knowledge that, however his father might have behaved to his mother, at least he was a man of ancient rank and ancient blood, which blood was his to-day. The rest would be forgotten, although enough of it was still remembered to permit of his being taunted by those street louts, and when it was forgotten the blood, that precious blue blood of an hidalgo of Spain, must still remain his heritage.