

BOOK THE THIRD

THE HARVESTING

CHAPTER XXIII

FATHER AND SON

When Adrian left his mother's house in the Bree Straat he wandered away at hazard, for so utterly miserable was he that he could form no plans as to what he was to do or whither he should go. Presently he found himself at the foot of that great mound which in Leyden is still known as the Burg, a strange place with a circular wall upon the top of it, said to have been constructed by the Romans. Up this mound he climbed, and throwing himself upon the grass under an oak which grew in one of the little recesses of those ancient walls, he buried his face in his hands and tried to think.

Think! How could he think? Whenever he shut his eyes there arose before them a vision of his mother's face, a face so fearful in its awesome and unnatural calm that vaguely he wondered how he, the outcast son, upon whom it had been turned like the stare of the Medusa's head, withering his very soul, could have seen it and still live. Why did he live? Why was he not dead, he who had a sword at his side? Was it because of his innocence? He was not guilty of this dreadful crime. He had never intended to hand over Dirk van Goorl and Foy and Martin to the

Inquisition. He had only talked about them to a man whom he believed to be a professor of judicial astrology, and who said that he could compound draughts which would bend the wills of women. Could he help it if this fellow was really an officer of the Blood Council? Of course not. But, oh! why had he talked so much? Oh! why had he signed that paper, why did he not let them kill him first? He had signed, and explain as he would, he could never look an honest man in the face again, and less still a woman, if she knew the truth. So he was not still alive because he was innocent, since for all the good that this very doubtful innocence of his was likely to be even to his own conscience, he might almost as well have been guilty. Nor was he alive because he feared to die. He did fear to die horribly, but to the young and impressionable, at any rate, there are situations in which death seems the lesser of two evils. That situation had been well-nigh reached by him last night when he set the hilt of his sword against the floor and shrank back at the prick of its point. To-day it was overpast.

No, he lived on because before he died he had a hate to satisfy, a revenge to work. He would kill this dog, Ramiro, who had tricked him with his crystal gazing and his talk of friendship, who had frightened him with the threat of death until he became like some poor girl and for fear signed away his honour--oh, Heaven! for very fear, he who prided himself upon his noble Spanish blood, the blood of warriors--this treacherous dog, who, having used him, had not hesitated to betray his shame to her from whom most of all it should have been hidden, and, for aught he knew, to the others also. Yes if ever he met him--his

own brother--Foy would spit upon him in the street; Foy, who was so hatefully open and honest, who could not understand into what degradation a man's nerves may drag him. And Martin, who had always mistrusted and despised him, why, if he found the chance, he would tear him limb from limb as a kite tears a partridge. And, worse still, Dirk van Goorl, the man who had befriended him, who had bred him up although he was no son of his, but the child of some rival, he would sit there in his prison cell, and while his face fell in and his bones grew daily plainer, till at length his portly presence was as that of a living skeleton, he would sit there by the window, watching the dishes of savoury food pass in and out beneath him, and between the pangs of his long-drawn, hideous agony, put up his prayer to God to pay back to him, Adrian, all the woe that he had caused.

Oh! it was too much. Under the crushing weight of his suffering, his senses left him, and he found such peace as to-day is won by those who are about to pass beneath the surgeon's knife; the peace that but too often wakes to a livelier agony.

When Adrian came to himself again, he felt cold, for already the autumn evening had begun to fall, and there was a feel in the clear, still air as of approaching frost. Also he was hungry (Dirk van Goorl, too, must be growing hungry now, he remembered), for he had eaten nothing since the yesterday. He would go into the town, get food, and then make up his mind what he should do.

Accordingly, descending from the Burg, Adrian went to the best inn in Leyden, and, seating himself at a table under the trees that grew outside of it, bade the waiting-man bring him food and beer. Unconsciously, for he was thinking of other things, in speaking to him, Adrian had assumed the haughty, Spanish hidalgo manner that was customary with him when addressing his inferiors. Even then he noticed, with the indignation of one who dwells upon his dignity, that this server made him no bow, but merely called his order to someone in the house, and, turning his back upon him, began to speak to a man who was loitering near. Soon Adrian became aware that he was the subject of that conversation, for the two of them looked at him out of the corners of their eyes, and jerked their thumbs towards him. Moreover, first one, then two, then quite a number of passers-by stopped and joined in the conversation, which appeared to interest them very much. Boys came also, a dozen or more of them, and women of the fish-wife stamp, and all of these looked at him out of the corner of their eyes, and from time to time jerked their thumbs towards him. Adrian began to feel uneasy and angered, but, drawing down his bonnet, and folding his arms upon his breast, he took no notice. Presently the server thrust his meal and flagon of beer before him with such clattering clumsiness that some of the liquor splashed over upon the table.

"Be more careful and wipe that up," said Adrian.

"Wipe it yourself," answered the man, rudely turning upon his heel.

Now Adrian was minded to be gone, but he was hungry and thirsty, so first, thought he, he would satisfy himself. Accordingly he lifted the tankard and took a long pull at it, when suddenly something struck the bottom of the vessel, jerking liquor over his face and doublet. He set it down with an oath, and laying his hand upon his sword hilt asked who had done this. But the mob, which by now numbered fifty or sixty, and was gathered about him in a triple circle, made no answer. They stood there staring sullenly, and in the fading light their faces seemed dangerous and hostile.

He was frightened. What could they mean? Yes, he was frightened, but he determined to brave it out, and lifted the cover from his meat, when something passed over his shoulder and fell into the dish, something stinking and abominable--to be particular, a dead cat. This was too much. Adrian sprang to his feet, and asked who dared thus to foul his food. The crowd did not jeer, did not even mock; it seemed too much in earnest for gibes, but a voice at the back called out:

"Take it to Dirk van Goorl. He'll be glad of it soon."

Now Adrian understood. All these people knew of his infamy; the whole of Leyden knew that tale. His lips turned dry, and the sweat broke out upon his body. What should he do? Brave it out? He sat down, and the fierce ring of silent faces drew a pace or two nearer. He tried to bid the man to bring more meat, but the words stuck in his throat. Now the mob saw his fear, and of a sudden seemed to augur his guilt from it, and to pass

sentence on him in their hearts. At least, they who had been so dumb broke out into yells and hoots.

"Traitor!" "Spanish spy!" "Murderer!" they screamed. "Who gave evidence against our Dirk? Who sold his brother to the rack?"

Then came another shriller note. "Kill him." "Hang him up by the heels and stone him." "Twist off his tongue," and so forth. Out shot a hand, a long, skinny, female hand, and a harsh voice cried, "Give us a keepsake, my pretty boy!" Then there was a sharp wrench at his head, and he knew that from it a lock of hair was missing. This was too much. He ought to have stopped there and let them kill him if they would, but a terror of these human wolves entered his soul and mastered him. To be trodden beneath those mire-stained feet, to be rent by those filthy hands, to be swung up living by the ankles to some pole and then carved piecemeal--he could not bear it. He drew his sword and turned to fly.

"Stop him," yelled the mob, whereon he lunged at them wildly, running a small boy through the arm.

The sight of blood and the screech of the wounded lad settled the question, and those who were foremost came at him with a spring. But Adrian was swifter than they, and before a hand could be laid upon him, amidst a shower of stones and filth, he was speeding down the street. After him came the mob, and then began one of the finest man-hunts ever known in Leyden.

From one street to another, round this turn and round that, sped the quarry, and after him, a swiftly growing pack, came the hounds. Some women drew a washing-line across the street to trip him. Adrian jumped it like a deer. Four men got ahead and tried to cut him off. He dodged them. Down the Bree Straat he went, and on his mother's door he saw a paper and guessed what was written there. They were gaining, they were gaining, for always fresh ones took the place of those who grew weary. There was but one chance for him now. Near by ran the Rhine, and here it was wide and unbridged. Perhaps they would not follow him through the water. In he went, having no choice, and swam for his life. They threw stones and bits of wood at him, and called for bows but, luckily for him, by now the night was falling fast, so that soon he vanished from their sight, and heard them crying to each other that he was drowned.

But Adrian was not drowned, for at that moment he was dragging himself painfully through the deep, greasy mud of the opposing bank and hiding among the old boats and lumber which were piled there, till his breath came to him again. But he could not stay long, for even if he had not been afraid that they would come and find him, it was too cold. So he crept away into the darkness.

Half an hour later, as, resting from their daily labours, Hague Simon and his consort Meg were seated at their evening meal, a knock came at

the door, causing them to drop their knives and to look at each other suspiciously.

"Who can it be?" marvelled Meg.

Simon shook his fat head. "I have no appointment," he murmured, "and I don't like strange visitors. There's a nasty spirit abroad in the town, a very nasty spirit."

"Go and see," said Meg.

"Go and see yourself, you----" and he added an epithet calculated to anger the meekest woman.

She answered it with an oath and a metal plate, which struck him in the face, but before the quarrel could go farther, again came the sound of raps, this time louder and more hurried. Then Black Meg went to open the door, while Simon took a knife and hid himself behind a curtain. After some whispering, Meg bade the visitor enter, and ushered him into the room, that same fateful room where the evidence was signed. Now he was in the light, and she saw him.

"Oh! come here," she gasped. "Simon, come and look at our little grandee." So Simon came, whereon the pair of them, clapping their hands to their ribs, burst into screams of laughter.

"It's the Don! Mother of Heaven! it is the Don," gurgled Simon.

Well might they laugh, they who had known Adrian in his pride and rich attire, for before them, crouching against the wall, was a miserable, bareheaded object, his hair stained with mud and rotten eggs, blood running from his temple where a stone had caught him, his garments a mass of filth and dripping water, one boot gone and his hose burst to tatters. For a while the fugitive bore it, then suddenly, without a word, he drew the sword that still remained to him and rushed at the bestial looking Simon, who skipped away round the table.

"Stop laughing," he said, "or I will put this through you. I am a desperate man."

"You look it," said Simon, but he laughed no more, for the joke had become risky. "What do you want, Heer Adrian?"

"I want food and lodging for so long as I please to stop here. Don't be afraid, I have money to pay you."

"I am thinking that you are a dangerous guest," broke in Meg.

"I am," replied Adrian; "but I tell you that I shall be more dangerous outside. I was not the only one concerned in that matter of the evidence, and if they get me they will have you too. You understand?"

Meg nodded. She understood perfectly; for those of her trade Leyden was growing a risky habitation.

"We will accommodate you with our best, Mynheer," she said. "Come upstairs to the Master's room and put on some of his clothes. They will fit you well; you are much of the same figure."

Adrian's breath caught in his throat.

"Is he here?" he asked.

"No, but he keeps his room."

"Is he coming back?"

"I suppose so, sometime, as he keeps his room. Do you want to see him?"

"Very much, but you needn't mention it; my business can wait till we meet. Get my clothes washed and dried as quickly as you can, will you? I don't care about wearing other men's garments."

A quarter of an hour later Adrian, cleaned and clothed, different indeed to look on from the torn and hunted fugitive, re-entered the sitting-room. As he came, clad in Ramiro's suit, Meg nudged her husband and whispered, "Like, ain't they?"

"Like as two devils in hell," Simon answered critically, then added, "Your food is ready; come, Mynheer, and eat."

So Adrian ate and drank heartily enough, for the meat and wine were good, and he needed them. Also it rejoiced him in a dull way to find that there was something left in which he could take pleasure, even if it were but eating and drinking. When he had finished he told his story, or so much of it as he wished to tell, and afterwards went to bed wondering whether his hosts would murder him in his sleep for the purse of gold he carried, half hoping that they might indeed, and slept for twelve hours without stirring.

All that day and until the evening of the next Adrian sat in the home of his spy hosts recovering his strength and brooding over his fearful fall. Black Meg brought in news of what passed without; thus he learned that his mother had sickened with the plague, and that the sentence of starvation was being carried out upon the body of her husband, Dirk van Goorl. He learned also the details of the escape of Foy and Martin, which were the talk of all the city. In the eyes of the common people they had become heroes, and some local poet had made a song about them which men were singing in the streets. Two verses of that song were devoted to him, Adrian; indeed, Black Meg repeated them to him word by word with a suppressed but malignant joy. Yes, this was what had happened; his brother had become a popular hero and he, Adrian, who in every way was so infinitely that brother's superior, an object of popular execration. And of all this the man, Ramiro, was the cause.

Well, he was waiting for Ramiro. That was why he risked his life by staying in Leyden. Sooner or later Ramiro would be bound to visit this haunt of his, and then--here Adrian drew his rapier and lunged and parried, and finally with hissing breath drove it down into the wood of the flooring, picturing, in a kind of luxury of the imagination, that the throat of Ramiro was between its point and the ground. Of course in the struggle that must come, the said Ramiro, who doubtless was a skilful swordsman, might get the upper hand; it might be his, Adrian's throat, which was between the point and the ground. Well, if so, it scarcely mattered; he did not care. At any rate, for this once he would play the man and then let the devil take his own; himself, or Ramiro, or both of them.

On the afternoon of the second day Adrian heard shouting in the streets, and Hague Simon came in and told him that a man had arrived with bad news from Mechlin; what it was he could not say, he was going to find out. A couple of hours went by and there was more shouting, this time of a determined and ordered nature. Then Black Meg appeared and informed him that the news from Mechlin was that everyone in that unhappy town had been slain by the Spaniards; that further the people of Leyden had risen and were marching to attack the Gevangenhuis. Out she hurried again, for when the waters were stormy then Black Meg must go afishing.

Another hour went by, and once more the street door was opened with a key, to be carefully shut when the visitor had entered.

Simon or Meg, thought Adrian, but as he could not be sure he took the precaution of hiding himself behind the curtain. The door of the room opened, and not Meg or Simon, but Ramiro entered. So his opportunity had come!

The Master seemed disturbed. He sat down upon a chair and wiped his brow with a silk handkerchief. Then aloud, and shaking his fist in the air, he uttered a most comprehensive curse upon everybody and everything, but especially upon the citizens of Leyden. After this once more he lapsed into silence, sitting, his one eye fixed upon vacancy, and twisting his waxed moustaches with his hand.

Now was Adrian's chance; he had only to step out from behind the curtain and run him through before he could rise from his seat. The plan had great charms, and doubtless he might have put it into execution had not Adrian's histrionic instincts stayed his hand. If he killed Ramiro thus, he would never know why he had been killed, and above all things Adrian desired that he should know. He wanted not only to wreak his wrongs, but to let his adversary learn why they were wreaked. Also, to do him justice, he preferred a fair fight to a secret stab delivered from behind, for gentlemen fought, but assassins stabbed.

Still, as there were no witnesses, he might have been willing to waive this point, if only he could make sure that Ramiro should learn the truth before he died. He thought of springing out and wounding him, and

then, after he had explained matters, finishing him off at his leisure. But how could he be sure of his sword-thrust, which might do too much or too little? No, come what would, the matter must be concluded in the proper fashion.

Choosing his opportunity, Adrian stepped from behind the hanging and placed himself between Ramiro and the door, the bolt of which he shot adroitly that no one might interrupt their interview. At the sound Ramiro started and looked up. In an instant he grasped the situation, and though his bronzed face paled, for he knew that his danger was great, rose to it, as might have been expected from a gentleman of his long and varied experience.

"The Heer Adrian called van Goorl, as I live!" he said. "My friend and pupil, I am glad to see you; but, if I might ask, although the times are rough, why in this narrow room do you wave about a naked rapier in that dangerous fashion?"

"Villain," answered Adrian, "you know why; you have betrayed me and mine, and I am dishonoured, and now I am going to kill you in payment."

"I see," said Ramiro, "the van Goorl affair again. I can never be clear of it for half an hour even. Well, before you begin, it may interest you to know that your worthy stepfather, after a couple of days' fasting, is by now, I suppose, free, for the rabble have stormed the Gevangenhuus. Truth, however, compels me to add that he is suffering badly from the

plague, which your excellent mother, with a resource that does her credit, managed to communicate to him, thinking this end less disagreeable on the whole than that which the law had appointed."

Thus spoke Ramiro, slowly and with purpose, for all the while he was so manoeuvring that the light from the lattice fell full upon his antagonist, leaving himself in the shadow, a position which experience taught him would prove of advantage in emergency.

Adrian made no answer, but lifted his sword.

"One moment, young gentleman," went on Ramiro, drawing his own weapon and putting himself on guard; "are you in earnest? Do you really wish to fight?"

"Yes," answered Adrian.

"What a fool you must be," mused Ramiro. "Why at your age should you seek to be rid of life, seeing that you have no more chance against me than a rat in a corner against a terrier dog? Look!" and suddenly he lunged most viciously straight at his heart. But Adrian was watching and parried the thrust.

"Ah!" continued Ramiro, "I knew you would do that, otherwise I should not have let fly, for all the angels know I do not wish to hurt you." But to himself he added, "The lad is more dangerous than I thought--my

life hangs on it. The old fault, friend, too high, too high!"

Then Adrian came at him like a tiger, and for the next thirty seconds nothing was heard in the room but the raspings of steel and the hard breathing of the two men.

At first Adrian had somewhat the better of it, for his assault was fierce, and he forced the older and cooler man to be satisfied with guarding himself. He did more indeed, for presently thrusting over Ramiro's guard, he wounded him slightly in the left arm. The sting of his hurt seemed to stir Ramiro's blood; at any rate he changed his tactics and began to attack in turn. Now, moreover, his skill and seasoned strength came to his aid; slowly but surely Adrian was driven back before him till his retreat in the narrow confines of the room became continuous. Suddenly, half from exhaustion and half because of a stumble, he reeled right across it, to the further wall indeed. With a guttural sound of triumph Ramiro sprang after him to make an end of him while his guard was down, caught his foot on a joined stool which had been overset in the struggle, and fell prone to the ground.

This was Adrian's chance. In an instant he was on him and had the point of his rapier at his throat. But he did not stab at once, not from any compunction, but because he wished his enemy to feel a little before he died, for, like all his race, Adrian could be vindictive and bloodthirsty enough when his hate was roused. Rapidly Ramiro considered the position. In a physical sense he was helpless, for Adrian had one

foot upon his breast, the other upon his sword-arm, and the steel at his throat. Therefore if time were given him he must trust to his wit.

"Make ready, you are about to die," said Adrian.

"I think not," replied the prostrate Ramiro.

"Why not?" asked Adrian, astonished.

"If you will be so kind as to move that sword-point a little--it is pricking me--thank you. Now I will tell you why. Because it is not usual for a son to stick his father as though he were a farmyard pig."

"Son? Father?" said Adrian. "Do you mean----?"

"Yes, I do mean that we have the happiness of filling those sacred relationships to each other."

"You lie," said Adrian.

"Let me stand up and give me my sword, young sir, and you shall pay for that. Never yet did a man tell the Count Juan de Montalvo that he lied, and live."

"Prove it," said Adrian.

"In this position, to which misfortune, not skill, has reduced me, I can prove nothing. But if you doubt it, ask your mother, or your hosts, or consult the registers of the Groote Kerke, and see whether on a date, which I will give you, Juan de Montalvo was, or was not, married to Lysbeth van Hout, of which marriage was born one Adrian. Man, I will prove it to you. Had I not been your father, would you have been saved from the Inquisition with others, and should I not within the last five minutes had run you through twice over, for though you fought well, your swordsmanship is no match for mine?"

"Even if you are my father, why should I not kill you, who have forced me to your will by threats of death, you who wronged and shamed me, you because of whom I have been hunted through the streets like a mad dog, and made an outcast?" And Adrian looked so fierce, and brought down his sword so close, that hope sank very low in Ramiro's heart.

"There are reasons which might occur to the religious," he said, "but I will give you one that will appeal to your own self-interest. If you kill me, the curse which follows the parricide will follow you to your last hour--of the beyond I say nothing."

"It would need to be a heavy one," answered Adrian, "if it was worse than that of which I know." But there was hesitation in his voice, for Ramiro, the skilful player upon human hearts, had struck the right string, and Adrian's superstitious nature answered to the note.

"Son," went on Ramiro, "be wise and hold your hand before you do that for which all hell itself would cry shame upon you. You think that I have been your enemy, but it is not so; all this while I have striven to work you good, but how can I talk lying thus like a calf before its butcher? Take the swords, both of them, and let me sit up, and I will tell you all my plans for the advantage of us both. Or if you wish it, thrust on and make an end. I will not plead for my life with you; it is not worthy of an hidalgo of Spain. Moreover, what is life to me who have known so many sorrows that I should seek to cling to it? Oh! God, who seest all, receive my soul, and I pray Thee pardon this youth his horrible crime, for he is mad and foolish, and will live to sorrow for the deed."

Since it was no further use to him, Ramiro had let the sword fall from his hand. Drawing it towards him with the point of his own weapon, Adrian stooped and picked it up.

"Rise," he said, lifting his foot, "I can kill you afterwards if I wish."

Could he have looked into the heart of his new-found parent as stiff and aching he staggered to his feet, the execution would not have been long delayed.

"Oh! my young friend, you have given me a nasty fright," thought Ramiro to himself, "but it is over now, and if I don't pay you out before I

have done with you, my sweet boy, your name is not Adrian."

Ramiro rose, dusted his garments, seated himself deliberately, and began to talk with great earnestness. It will be sufficient to summarise his arguments. First of all, with the most convincing sincerity, he explained that when he had made use of him, Adrian, he had no idea that he was his son. Of course this was a statement that will not bear a moment's examination, but Ramiro's object was to gain time, and Adrian let it pass. Then he explained that it was only after his mother had, not by his wish, but accidentally, seen the written evidence upon which her husband was convicted, that he found out that Adrian van Goorl was her child and his own. However, as he hurried to point out, all these things were now ancient history that had no bearing on the present. Owing to the turbulent violence of the mob, which had driven him from his post and fortress, he, Ramiro, was in temporary difficulties, and owing to other circumstances, he, Adrian, was, so far as his own party and people were concerned, an absolutely dishonoured person. In this state of affairs he had a suggestion to make. Let them join forces; let the natural relationship that existed between them, and which had been so nearly severed by a sword thrust that both must have regretted, become real and tender. He, the father, had rank, although it suited him to sink it; he had wide experience, friends, intelligence, and the prospect of enormous wealth, which, of course, he could not expect to enjoy for ever. On the other side, he, the son, had youth, great beauty of person, agreeable and distinguished manners, a high heart, the education of a young man of the world, ambition and powers of mind that

would carry him far, and for the immediate future an object to gain, the affection of a lady whom all acknowledged to be as good as she was charming, and as charming as she was personally attractive.

"She hates me," broke in Adrian.

"Ah!" laughed Ramiro, "there speaks the voice of small experience. Oh! youth, so easily exalted and so easily depressed! Joyous, chequered youth! How many happy marriages have I not known begin with such hate as this? Well, there it is, you must take my word for it. If you want to marry Elsa Brant, I can manage it for you, and if not, why, you can leave it alone."

Adrian reflected, then as his mind had a practical side, he put a question.

"You spoke of the prospect of enormous wealth; what is it?"

"I will tell you, I will tell you," whispered his parent, looking about him cautiously; "it is the vast hoard of Hendrik Brant which I intend to recover; indeed, my search for it has been at the root of all this trouble. And now, son, you can see how open I have been with you, for if you marry Elsa that money will legally be your property, and I can only claim whatever it may please you to give me. Well, as to that question, in the spirit of the glorious motto of our race, 'Trust to God and me,' I shall leave it to your sense of honour, which, whatever its troubles,

has never yet failed the house of Montalvo. What does it matter to me who is the legal owner of the stuff, so long as it remains in the family?"

"Of course not," replied Adrian, loftily, "especially as I am not mercenary."

"Ah! well," went on Ramiro, "we have talked for a long while, and if I continue to live there are affairs to which I ought to attend. You have heard all I have to say, and you have the swords in your hand, and, of course, I am--only your prisoner on parole. So now, my son, be so good as to settle this matter without further delay. Only, if you make up your mind to use the steel, allow me to show you where to thrust, as I do not wish to undergo any unnecessary discomfort"--and he stood before him and bowed in a very courtly and dignified fashion.

Adrian looked at him and hesitated. "I don't trust you," he said; "you have tricked me once and I daresay that you will trick me again. Also I don't think much of people who masquerade under false names and lay such

traps as you laid to get my evidence against the rest of them. But I am in a bad place and without friends. I want to marry Elsa and recover my position in the world; also, as you know well, I can't cut the throat of my own father in cold blood," and he threw down one of the swords.

"Your decision is just such as I would have expected from my knowledge

of your noble nature, son Adrian," remarked Ramiro as he picked up his weapon and restored it to the scabbard. "But now, before we enter upon this perfect accord, I have two little stipulations to make on my side."

"What are they?" asked Adrian.

"First, that our friendship should be complete, such as ought to exist between a loving father and son, a friendship without reservations. Secondly--this is a condition that I fear you may find harder--but, although fortune has led me into stony paths, and I fear some doubtful expedients, there was always one thing which I have striven to cherish and keep pure, and that in turn has rewarded me for my devotion in many a dangerous hour, my religious belief. Now I am Catholic, and I could wish that my son should be Catholic also; these horrible errors, believe me, are as dangerous to the soul as just now they happen to be fatal to the body. May I hope that you, who were brought up but not born in heresy, will consent to receive instruction in the right faith?"

"Certainly you may," answered Adrian, almost with enthusiasm. "I have had enough of conventicles, psalm-singing, and the daily chance of being burned; indeed, from the time when I could think for myself I always wished to be a Catholic."

"Your words make me a happy man," answered Ramiro. "Allow me to unbolt the door, I hear our hosts. Worthy Simon and Vrouw, I make you parties to a solemn and joyful celebration. This young man is my son, and in

token of my fatherly love, which he has been pleased to desire, I now take him in my arms and embrace him before you," and he suited the action to the word.

But Black Meg, watching his face in astonishment from over Adrian's shoulder, saw its one bright eye suddenly become eclipsed. Could it be that the noble Master had winked?