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Barbara Blomberg -- Volume 10 by Georg Ebers

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Barbara Blomberg -- Volume 10

CHAPTER XVI.

On the way home Barbara often pressed her left hand with her right to assure herself that she was not dreaming.

This time she found her husband in the house. At the first glance Pyramus saw that something unusual had happened; but she gave him no time to question her, only glanced around to see if they were alone, and then cried, as if frantic: "I will bear it no longer. You must know it too. But it is a great secret." Then she made him swear that he, too, would keep it strictly, and in great anxiety he obeyed.

He, like Barbara's father, had supposed that the Emperor's son had entered the world only to leave it again. Barbara's "I no longer have a child; it was taken from me," he had interpreted in the same way as the old captain, and, from delicacy of feeling, had never again mentioned the subject in her presence.

While taking the oath, he had been prepared for the worst; but when his wife, in passionate excitement, speaking so fast that the words fair tumbled over one another, told him how she had been robbed of her boy; how his imperial father had treated him; how she had longed for him; what prayers she had uttered in his behalf; how miserable she had been in her anxiety about this child; and, now, that Dona Magdalena's letter permitted her to cherish the highest and greatest hopes for the boy, the tall, strong man stood before her with downcast eyes, like a detected criminal, his hand gripping the edge of the top of the table which separated her from him.

Barbara saw his broad, arched chest rise and fall, and wondered why his manly features were quivering; but ere she had time to utter a single soothing word, he burst forth: "I made the vow and will be silent; but to-morrow, or in a year or two, it will be in everybody's mouth, and then, then My good name! Honour!"

Fierce indignation overwhelmed Barbara, and, no longer able to control herself, she exclaimed: "What did it matter whether Death or his father snatched the child from me? The question is, whether you knew that I am his mother, and it was not concealed from you. Nevertheless, you came and sought me for your wife! That is what happened! And---you know this ---you are as much or little dishonoured by me, the mother of the living child, as of the dead one. Out upon the honour which is harmed by gossip! What slanderous tongues say of me as a disgrace I deem the highest honour; but if you are of a different opinion, and held it when you wooed me, you would be wiser to prate less loudly of the proud word 'honour,' and we will separate."

Pyramus had listened to these accusations and the threat with trembling lips. His simple but upright mind felt that she was right, so far as he was concerned, and she was more beautiful in her anger than he had seen her since the brilliant days of her youthful pride. The fear of losing her seized his poor heart, so wholly subject to her, with sudden power and, stammering an entreaty for forgiveness, he confessed that the surprise had bewildered him, and that he thought he had showed in the course of the last ten years how highly, in spite of people's gossip, he prized her. He held out his large honest hand with a pleading look as he spoke, and she placed hers in it for a short time.

Then she went to church to collect her thoughts and relieve her overburdened heart. Boundless contempt for the man to whom she was united filled it; yet she felt that she owed him a debt of gratitude, that he was weak only through love, and that, for her children's sake, she must continue to wear the yoke which she had taken upon herself.

His existence henceforth became of less and less importance to her feelings and actions, especially as he left the management of their two boys to her. He had reason to be satisfied with it, for she provided Conrad with the best

instruction, that the might choose between the army and the legal profession; his younger brother she intended for the priesthood, and the boy's inclination harmonized with her choice.

The fear that the Emperor Charles might yet commit the child she loved to the monastery never left her. But she thought that she might induce Heaven to relinquish its claim upon her John, whom, moreover, it seemed to have destined for the secular life, by consecrating her youngest child to its service.

While she did not forget her household, her mind was constantly in Spain. Her walks were usually directed toward the palace, to inquire how the recluse in San Yuste was faring, and whether any rumour mentioned her imperial son.

After the great victory gained by Count Egmont against the military forces of France, eleven months after the battle of St. Quentin, there was enough to be seen in Brussels. The successful general was greeted with enthusiastic devotion. Egmont's name was in every one's mouth, and when she, too, saw the handsome, proud young hero, the idol, as it were, of a whole nation, gorgeous in velvet, silk, and glittering gems, curbing his fiery steed and bowing to the shouting populace with a winning smile, she thought she caught a glimpse of the future, and beheld the predecessor of him who some day would receive similar homage.

Why should she not have yielded to such hopes? Already there was a rumour that the daughter of the Emperor and that Johanna Van der Gheynst, who had been Charles's first love, Margaret of Parma, her own son's sister, had been chosen to rule the Netherlands as regent.

Why should less honours await Charles's son than his daughter?

But the festal joy in the gay capital was suddenly extinguished, for in the autumn of the year that, in March, had seen Ferdinand, the Emperor's brother, assume the imperial crown, a rumour came that the recluse of San Yuste had closed his eyes, and a few days after it was verified.

It was Barbara's husband who told her of the loss which had befallen her and the world. He did this with the utmost consideration, fearing the effect of this agitating news upon his wife; but Barbara only turned pale, and then, with tears glittering in her eyes, said softly, "He, too, was only a mortal man."

Then she withdrew to her own room, and even on the following day saw neither her husband nor her children. She had long expected Charles's death, yet it pierced the inmost depths of her being.

This sorrow was something sacred, which belonged to her and to her alone. It would have seemed a profanation to reveal it to her unloved husband, and she found strength to shut it within herself.

How desolate her heart seemed! It had lost its most distinguished object of love or hate.

Through long days she devoted herself in quiet seclusion to the memory of the dead, but soon her active imagination unfolded its wings again, and with the new grief mingled faint hopes for the boy in Spain, which increased to lofty anticipations and torturing anxiety.

The imperial father was dead. What now awaited the omnipotent ruler's son?

How had Charles determined his fate?

Was it possible that he still intended him for the monastic life, now that he had become acquainted with his talents and tastes?

Since Barbara had learned that her son had won his father's heart, and that the Emperor, as it were, had made him his own with a kiss, she had grown confident in the hope that Charles would bestow upon him the grandeur, honours, and splendour which she had anticipated when she resigned him at Landshut, and to which his birth gave him a claim. But her early experience that what she expected with specially joyful security rarely happened,---constantly forced upon her mind the, fear that the dead man's will would consign John to the cloister.

So the next weeks passed in a constant alternation of oppressive fears and aspiring hopes, the nights in torturing terrors.

All the women of the upper classes wore mourning, and with double reason; for, soon after the news of the Emperor's death reached Brussels, King Philip's second wife, Mary Tudor, of England, also died. Therefore no one noticed that Barbara wore widow's weeds, and she was glad that she could do so without wounding Pyramus.

A part of the elaborate funeral rites which King Philip arranged in Brussels during the latter part of December in honour of his dead father was the procession which afforded the authorities of the Brabant capital an opportunity to display the inventive faculty, the love of splendour, the learning, and the wit which, as members of flourishing literary societies, they constantly exercised. In the pageant was a ship with black sails, at whose keel, mast, and helm stood Hope with her anchor, Faith with her chalice, and Love with the burning heart. Other similar scenic pieces made the sincerity of the grief for the dead questionable, and yet many real tears were shed for him. True, the wind which swelled the sails of the sable ship bore also many an accusation and curse; among the spectators of the procession there were only too many whose mourning robes were worn not for the dead monarch, but their own nearest relatives, whom his pitiless edicts had given to the executioner as readers of the Bible or heterodox.

These displays, so pleasing to the people of her time and her new home, were by no means great or magnificent enough for Barbara. Even the most superb show seemed to her too trivial for this dead man.

She was never absent from any mass for the repose of his soul, and she not only took part outwardly in the sacred ceremony, but followed it with fervent devotion. As a transfigured spirit, he would perceive how she had once hated him; but he should also see how tenderly she still loved him.

Now that he was dead, it would be proved in what way he had remembered the son whom, in his solitude, he had learned to love, what life path John had been assigned by his father.

But longingly as Barbara thought of Spain and of her boy, often as she went to the Dubois house and to the regent's home to obtain news, nothing could be heard of her child.

Many provisions of the imperial will were known, but there was no mention of her son. Yet Charles could not have forgotten him, and Adrian protested that it would soon appear that he had not omitted him in his last will, and this was done in a manner which indicated that he knew more than he would or could confess.

All this increased Barbara's impatience to the highest degree, and induced her to watch and question with twofold zeal. On no account would she have left the capital during this period of decision, and, though her husband earnestly entreated her to go to the springs, whose waters had proved so beneficial, she remained in Brussels.

In August she saw King Philip set out for Spain, and Margaret of Parma, her son's sister, assume the government of the Netherlands as regent.

On various occasions she succeeded in obtaining a near view of the stately-lady, with her clever; kindly and, spite of the famous down on her upper lip, by no means unlovely features, and her attractive appearance gave Barbara courage to request an audience, in order to learn from her something about her child. But the effort was vain, for the duchess had had no news of the existence of a second son of her father; and this time it was Granvelle who prevented the regent from receiving the woman who would probably have spoken to her of the boy concerning whose fate King Philip had yet reached no determination.

Barbara spent the month of October in depression caused by this fresh disappointment, but it, too, passed without bringing her any satisfaction.

It seemed almost foolish to lull herself further with ambitious expectations, but the hope a mother's heart cherishes for her child does not die until its last throb; and if the Emperor Charles's will did not give her John his rights, then the gracious Virgin would secure them, if necessary, by a miracle.

Her faithful clinging to hope was rewarded, for when one day, with drooping head, she returned home from another futile errand, she found Hannibal Melas there, as bearer of important news.

The Emperor's last will had a codicil, which concerned a son of his Majesty; but, a few days before his end, Charles had also remembered Barbara, and commissioned Ogier Bodart, Adrian's successor, to buy a life annuity for her in Brussels. Hannibal had learned all this from secret despatches received by Granvelle the day before. Informing her of their contents might cost him his place; but how often she had entreated him to think of her if any news came from Valladolid of a boy named Geronimo or John, and how much kindness she had showed him when he was only a poor choir boy!

At last, at last the most ardent desire of the mother's heart was to be fulfilled. She saw in the codicil the bridge which would lead her son to splendour and magnificence, and up to the last hour of his life the Emperor Charles had also remembered her.

She felt not only relieved of a burden, but as if borne on wings. Which of these two pieces of news rendered her the happier, she could not have determined. Yet she did not once think of the addition to her income. What was that in comparison to the certainty that to the last Charles did not forget her!

It made her husband happy to see her sunny cheerfulness. Never had she played and romped with the children in such almost extravagant mirth. Nay, more! For the first time the officer's modest house echoed with the singing of its mistress.

Though her voice was no longer so free from sharpness and harshness as in the old days, it by no means jarred upon the ear; nay, every tone revealed its admirable training. She had broken the long silence with Josquin's motet, "Quia amore languo," and in her quiet chamber dedicated it, as it were, to the man to whom this cry of longing had been so dear. Then, in memory of and gratitude to him, other religious songs which he had liked to hear echoed from her lips.

The little German ballads which she afterward sang, to the delight of her boys, deeply moved her husband's heart, and she herself found that it was no insult to art when, with the voice that she now possessed, she again devoted herself to the pleasure of singing.

If the codicil brought her son what she desired, she could once more, if her voice lost the sharpness which still clung to it, serve her beloved art as a not wholly unworthy priestess, and then, perchance, she would again possess the right, so long relinquished, of calling herself happy.

She would go the next day to Appenzelder, who always greeted her kindly when they met in the street, and ask his advice.

If only Wolf had been there!

He understood how to manage women's voices also, and could have given her the best directions how to deal with the new singing exercises.

It seemed as though in these days not one of her wishes remained unfulfilled, for the very next afternoon, just as she was dressing to call upon the leader of the boy choir, the servant announced a stranger.

A glad presentiment hurried her into the vestibule, and there stood Sir Wolf Hartschwert in person, an aristocratic cavalier in his black Spanish court costume. He had become a man indeed, and his appearance did not even lack the "sosiego," the calm dignity of the Castilian noble, which gave Don Louis Quijada so distinguished an appearance.

True, his greeting was more eager and cordial than the genuine "sosiego" ---which means "repose"---would have permitted. Even the manner in which Wolf expressed his pleasure in the new melody of Barbara's voice, and whispered an entreaty to send the children and Frau Lamperi---who came to greet him---away for a short time, was anything but patient.

What had he in view?

Yet it must be something good.

When the light shone through her flower-decked window upon his face, she thought she perceived this by the smile hovering around his lips. She was not mistaken, nor did she wait long for the joyous tidings she expected; his desire to tell her what, with the exception of the regent--- to whom his travelling companion, the Grand Prior Don Luis de Avila, was perhaps just telling it as King Philip's envoy---no human being in the Netherlands could yet know, was perhaps not much less than hers to hear it.

Scarcely an hour before he had dismounted in Brussels with the nobleman, and his first visit was to her, whom his news must render happy, even happier than it did him and the woman in the house near the palace, whose heart cherished the Emperor's son scarcely less warmly than his own mother's.

On the long journey hither he had constantly anticipated the pleasure of telling every incident in succession, just as it had happened; but Barbara interrupted his first sentence with an inquiry how her John was faring.

"He is so well that scarcely ever has any boy in the happiest time of his life fared better," was the reply; and its purport, as well as the tone in which it was uttered, entered Barbara's heart like angels' greetings from the wide-open heavens. But Wolf went on with his report, and when, in spite of hundreds of questions, he at last completed the main points, his listener staggered, as if overcome by wine, to the image of the Virgin on the pilaster, and with uplifted hands threw herself on her knees before it.

Wolf, unobserved, silently stole away.

CHAPTER XVII.

The following afternoon Wolf sought Barbara again, and now for the first time succeeded in relating regularly and clearly what, constantly interrupted by her impatience, he had told in a confused medley the day before. Pyramus, as usual, was away, and Barbara had taken care that no one should interrupt them.

Deep silence pervaded the comfortable room, and Wolf had seated himself in the arm-chair opposite to the young wife when, at her entreaty, he began to tell the story again. She had informed him of Dona Magdalena's letter, and that it took her to the Emperor's residence in San Yuste. At that point her friend's fresh tidings began.

In the spring of the previous year Wolf had again been summoned from Valladolid, where in the winter he directed the church singing as prinner of the religious music, to Cuacos, near San Yuste, where Quijada's wife lived with her foster-son Geronimo. From there he had often gone with Dona Magdalena and the boy to the Emperor's residence, and frequently saw him.

The account given in the letter written by Quijada's wife also applied to the last months of the imperial recluse's existence. Doubtless he sometimes devoted himself to pious exercises and quiet meditation, but he was usually busied with political affairs and the reading and dictating of despatches. Even at that time he received many visitors. When Geronimo came from Cuacos, he was permitted to go in and out of his apartments freely, and the Emperor even seemed to prefer him to Don Carlos, his grandson, King Philip's only son, who was destined to become the head of his house; at least, Charles's conduct favoured this opinion.

On his return to Spain he had made his grandson's acquaintance in Valladolid.

He was a boy who had well-formed, somewhat sickly features, and a fragile body. Of course the grandfather felt the deepest interest in him, and the influence of the famous victor in so many battles upon the twelve-year-old lad was a most beneficial one.

But Charles had scarcely left Valladolid when the passionate boy's extremely dangerous tastes burst forth with renewed violence. The recluse student of human nature had probably perceived them, for when his tutor, and especially the young evildoer's aunt, Juana, the Emperor Charles's daughter, earnestly entreated him to let the grandson, whose presence would disturb him very little, come to San Yuste, because his influence over Don Carlos would be of priceless value, the grandfather most positively refused the request.

On the other hand, the Emperor had not only tolerated his son Geronimo near him, but rejoiced in his presence, for the quiet sufferer's eyes had sparkled when he saw him. Wolf himself had often witnessed this delightful sight.

How Barbara's heart swelled, how eagerly she listened, as Wolf described how well founded was his Majesty's affection for this beautiful, extremely lovable, docile, true-hearted, and, moreover, frank, boy!

True, he showed as yet little taste for knowledge and all that can be learned from books; but he devoted himself with fiery zeal to the knightly exercises which since his Majesty's death Quijada himself was directing, and in which he promised to become a master. Besides, by appealing to his ambition, he could be induced to put forth all his powers, and, if his teachers aimed at what they studiously omitted, it would not be difficult to make a scholar of him.

He had not remained unnoticed by any of the great lords who had sought the Emperor in Sal Yuste and met him. The Venetian ambassador Bodoaro, had asked the name of the splendid young noble.

Even when Death was already stretching hi hand toward the Emperor, he was still overburdened with business, and the heretical agitation which was discovered at that time in Spain had caused him much sorrow, especially as men and

women whom he knew personally, belonging to the distinguished families of Posa and De Rojas, has taken part in it.

The monarch's end came more quickly than was expected. He had been unable to attend the auto-da-fe at which the heretics were committed to the flames. He would have done so gladly, and after this mournful experience even regretted that he had granted the German misleader, Luther, the safe conduct promised.

Before a fatal weakness suddenly attacked him his health had been rather better than before; then his voice failed, and Quijada was compelled to kneel beside his bed that he might understand what he wished to impress upon him. While doing so, the dying man had expressed the desire that Don Luis would commend Geronimo to the love of his son Philip.

He had also remembered the love of better days, and when Barbara insisted upon learning what he had said of her, Wolf, who had heard it from Don Luis, did not withhold it.

He had complained of her perverse nature. Had she obediently gone to the convent, he might have spared himself and her the sorrow of holding her so rigidly aloof from his person. Finally, he had spoken of her singing with rapturous delight. At night the "Quia amore langueo" from the Mary motet had echoed softly from his lips, and when he perceived that Don Luis had heard him, he murmured that this peerless cry of longing, reminded him not of the earthly but the heavenly love.

At these words Barbara hid her face in her hands, and Wolf paused until she had controlled the sobs which shook her breast.

Then he went on, she listening devoutly with wet eyes and clasped hands.

The Archbishop of Toledo was summoned, and predicted that Charles would die on the day after to-morrow, St. Matthew's day. He was born on St. Matthias's day, and he would depart from life on St. Matthew's,--- [September 12, 1558]---Matthias's brother and fellow-disciple.

So it was, and Barbara remembered that his son and hers had also seen the light of the world on St. Matthias's day.

Charles's death-agony was severe. When Dr. Mathys at last said softly to those who were present, "Jam moritur,"---[Now he is dying]---the loud cry "Jesus!" escaped his lips, and he sank back upon the pillows lifeless.

Here Wolf was again obliged to give his weeping friend time to calm herself.

What he now had to relate---both knew it---was well suited to transform the tears which Barbara was shedding in memory of the beloved dead to tears of joy.

While she was wiping her eyes, Wolf described the great anxiety which, after Charles's death, overpowered the Quijadas in Villagarcia.

The codicil had existed, and Don Luis was familiar with its contents. But how would King Philip take it?

Dona Magdalena knew not what to do with herself in her anxiety.

The immediate future must decide Geronimo's fate, so she went on a pilgrimage with her darling to the Madonna of Guadalupe to pray for the repose of the Emperor's soul, and also to beseech the gracious Virgin mercifully to remember him, Geronimo.

Until that time the boy had believed Don Luis and his wife to be his parents, and had loved Dona Magdalena like the most affectionate son.

He had not even the slightest suspicion that he was a child of the Emperor, and was perfectly satisfied with the lot of being the son of a grandee and the child of so good, tender, and beautiful a mother.

This exciting expectation on the part of the Quijadas lasted nearly a whole year, for it was that length of time before Don Philip finally left the Netherlands and reached Valladolid.

He spent the anniversary of his father's death in the monastery of Del Abrojo.

There, or previously, he had read the codicil in which his imperial father acknowledged the boy Geronimo as his son.

Barbara now desired to learn the contents of the codicil and, as Wolf had told her yesterday how the boy's fate had changed, he interrupted his narrative and obeyed her wish.

As a widower, Charles confessed that he had had a son in Germany by an unmarried woman. He had reason to wish that the boy should assume the robe of a reformed order, but he must be neither forced nor persuaded to do so. If he wished to remain in the world, he would settle upon him a yearly income of from twenty to thirty thousand ducats, which was to pass also to his heirs. Whatever mode of life he might choose, he commanded his son Philip to honour him and treat him with due respect.

As on the day before, when Barbara had only learned in general terms what the codicil contained, her soul to-day, while listening to the more minute particulars, was filled with grateful joy.

Her sacrifice had not been vain. For years the fear of seeing her son vanish in a monastery had darkened her days and nights, and Quijada and Dona Magdalena had also probably dreaded that King Philip might confide his half-brother to a reformed order, for the monarch had by no means hastened to inform the anxious pair what he had determined.

It was not until the end of September that, upon the pretext of hunting, he went to the monastery of San Pedro de la Espina, a league from Villagarcia, and ordered Don Luis to seek him there with the boy. He was to leave the latter wholly unembarrassed, and not even inform him that the gentleman whom he would meet was the King.

His decision, he had added in the chilling manner characteristic of him, would depend upon circumstances.

Quijada, with a throbbing heart, obeyed, but Geronimo had no suspicion of what awaited him, and only wondered why his mother took so much trouble about his dress, since they were merely going hunting. The tears glittering in her eyes he attributed to the anxiety which she often expressed when he rode with the hunters on the fiery young Andalusian which his father had given him. He was then twelve years and a half old, but might easily have been taken for fourteen.

"It was a splendid sight," Wolf went on, "as the erect figure of the dark Don Luis, on his powerful black stallion, galloped beside the fair, handsome boy with his white skin and blue eyes, who managed his spirited dun horse so firmly and joyously.

"Dona Magdalena and I followed them on our quiet bays. Her lips moved constantly, and her right hand never stirred from the rosary at her belt while we were riding along the woodland paths.

"To soothe her, I began to talk about the pieces of music which his Majesty had brought from Brussels, but she did not hear me. So I remained silent until the monastery glimmered through the trees. "The blood left her cheeks, for at the same moment the thought came to us both that King Philip was taking him to the monks.

"But we had scarcely time to confide what we feared to each other ere the blast of horns echoed from the forest.

"Then, to calm the anxious mother's heart, I remarked, 'His Majesty would not have the horns sounded in that way if he were taking the pious brothers a new companion,' and Dona Magdalena's wan cheeks again flushed slightly.

"The forest is cleared in front of the monastery, but it surrounds on all sides the open glade amid whose grass the meadow saffron was then growing thickly.

"I can still see Geronimo as he swung himself from the saddle to gather some of the flowers. His mother needed them as medicine for a poor woman in the village.

"We stopped behind the last trees, where we had a good view of the glade. Don Luis left the boy to himself for a time; but when the blast of horns and the baying of the hounds sounded nearer, he ordered him, in the commanding tone he used in teaching him to ride, to remount.

"Geronimo laughed, thrust the flowers hastily into his saddlebag, and with a bold leap vaulted on his horse's back.

"A few minutes after, the King rode out of the forest.

"He was mounted on a noble bay hunting charber, and wore a huntsman's dress.

"No rider can hold a slender figure more erect.

"His haughty head, with the fair, pointed beard, was carried slightly thrown back, which gave him an especially arrogant appearance.

"When he saw Quijada, he raised his riding-whip with a significant gesture to his lips. We, too, understood what it meant, and Don Luis knew him far better than we.

"He greeted the King without the least constraint, as if he were merely a friend of noble birth, then beckoned to Geronimo, and the introduction was only the brief words, 'My son' and 'The Count of Flanders.'

"The boy raised his little plumed hat with frank courtesy and, while bowing in the saddle, forced his dun horse to approach the King sideways. It was no easy matter, and seemed to please his Majesty, for a smile of satisfaction flitted over his cold features, and we heard him exclaim to Quijada, 'A horseman, and, if the saints so will, a knight well pleasing to Heaven.'

"What more he said to the boy we learned later. The words which by the movement of his lips we saw that he added to the exclamation were, 'Unless our noble young friend prefers to consecrate himself in humility to the service of the highest of all Masters.'

"He had pointed to the monastery as he spoke. Geronimo did not delay his reply, but, crossing himself, answered quickly:

"I wish to be a faithful servant of our Lord Jesus Christ, but only in the world, fighting against his foes."

"Philip nodded so eagerly that his stiff white ruff was pushed awry, and then, with patronizing approval, added: 'So every nobleman ought to think. You, my young friend, saw a short time ago at the auto-da-fe in Valladolid how a considerable number of Spanish gentlemen of the noblest blood expiated at the stake the mortal sin of heresy. A severe punishment, and a terrible end! Would you perhaps have preferred to see his Majesty's mercy grant them their lives?'"

"On no account, my Lord Count," cried Geronimo eagerly. "There is no mercy for the heretic."

"His Majesty now summoned the two knights who attended him and, while one held his horse, he dismounted.

"At a sign from Quijada, Geronimo now also sprang to the ground, and gazed wonderingly at the stranger, whom, on account of his fair beard, he supposed to be a Netherland noble; but Dona Magdalena could bear to remain under the trees no longer, and I followed her to the edge of the meadow. The King advanced toward the boy, and stood before him with so proud and dignified a bearing that one might have supposed his short figure had grown two heads taller.

"Geronimo must have felt that some very distinguished personage confronted him, and that something great awaited him, for he involuntarily raised his hat again. His wavy golden locks now fell unconfined around his head, his cheeks glowed, and his large blue eyes gazed questioningly and with deep perplexity into the stranger's face as he said slowly, with significant emphasis: 'I am not the man whom you suppose. Who, boy, do you think that I might be?'"

"Geronimo turned pale; only one head could be lifted with so haughty a majesty, and suddenly remembering the face which he had seen upon many a coin, sure that he was right, he bent the knee with modest grace, saying, 'Our sovereign lord, his Majesty King Philip'"

"I am he," was the reply. "But to you, dear boy, I am still more."

"As he spoke he gave him his hand, and, when Geronimo rose, he said, pointing to his breast: 'Your place is here, my boy; for the Emperor Charles, who is now enjoying the bliss of heaven, was your father as well as mine, and you, lad, are my brother.'

"Then passing his arm around his shoulders, he drew him gently toward him, lightly imprinting a kiss upon his brow and cheeks; but Geronimo, deeply moved, pressed his fresh red lips to his royal brother's right hand. Yet he had scarcely raised his head again when he started, and in an agitated tone asked, 'And Don Luis---and my dear mother?'"

"Continue to love and honour them," replied the King.---"Explain the rest to him, Don Luis. But keep what has happened here secret for the present. I will present him myself to our people as my brother. He received in holy baptism the name of John, which in Castilian is Juan. Let him keep it.---Give me your hand again, Don Juan d'Austria.---[Don John of Austria]---A proud name! Do it honour."

"He turned away as he spoke, mounted with the aid of one of his knights, waved his hand graciously to Quijada and, while his horse was already moving, called to him, 'My brother, Don Juan, will be addressed as your Excellency.'

"He took no notice of Dona Magdalena, probably because she had appeared here either without or against his orders, and thus offended one of the forms of etiquette on which he placed so much value. So his Majesty neither saw nor heard how the son of an Emperor and the brother of a King rushed up to his foster-mother, threw himself into her outstretched arms, and exclaimed with warm affection, 'Mother! my dear, dear mother!'"

Barbara had listened weeping to this description, but the last sentence dried her tears and, like Frau Traut a short time ago, her friend regretted that he had not exercised greater caution as he heard her, still sobbing, but with an angry shrug of the shoulders, repeat the exclamation which her son---ay, her son only---had poured forth from his overflowing heart to another woman.

So Wolf did not tell her what he had witnessed in Villagarcia, when Don Juan and Dona Magdalena had fallen into each other's arms, and that when he asked about his real mother the lady answered that she was an unfortunate woman who must remain away from him, but for whom it would be his duty to provide generously.

Directly after, on the second day of October, Wolf added, the King had presented her son to the court as his Excellency, his brother Don John of Austria!

He, Wolf, had set off for Brussels with the grand prior that very day, and, as his ship sailed from Spain before any other, he had succeeded in being the first to bring this joyful news to the Netherlands and to her.

When Wolf left Barbara, it seemed as though what had hitherto appeared a bewildering, happy dream had now for the first time been confirmed. The lofty goal she had striven to reach, and of which she had never lost sight, was now gained; but a bitter drop of wormwood mingled with the happiness that filled her grateful heart to overflowing. Another woman had forced herself into her place and robbed her of the boy's love, which belonged to her and, after his father's death, to her alone.

Every thought of the much-praised Dona Magdalena stirred her blood. How cruel had been the anguish and fears which she had endured for this child she alone could know; but the other enjoyed every pleasure that the possession of so highly gifted a young creature could afford. She could say to herself that, of all sins, the one farthest from her nature was envy; but what she felt toward this stealer of love fatally resembled sharp, gnawing ill will.

Yet the bright sense of happiness which pervaded her whole being rendered it easy for her to thrust the image of the unloved woman far into the shade, and the next morning became a glorious festival for her; she used it to pay a visit to the Dubois couple, and when she told them what she had heard from Wolf, and saw Frau Traut sob aloud in her joy and Adrian wipe tears of grateful emotion from his aged eyes, her own happiness was doubled by the others' sympathy.

Barbara had anticipated Wolf, but while going home she met him on his way to the Dubois house. He joined her, and still had many questions to answer.

During the next few days her friend helped her compose a letter to her son; but he was constantly obliged to impose moderation upon the passionate vehemence of her feelings. She often yielded to his superior prudence, only she would not fulfil his desire to address her boy as "your Excellency."

When she read the letter, she thought she had found the right course.

Barbara first introduced herself to John as his real mother. She had loved and honoured his great father with all the strength of her soul, and she might boast of having been clear to him also. By the Emperor Charles's command he, her beloved child, had been taken from her. She had submitted with a bleeding heart and, to place him in the path of fortune, had inflicted the deepest wounds upon her own soul. Now her self-sacrifice was richly rewarded, and it would make her happier than himself if she should learn that his own merit had led him to the height of fame which she prayed that he might reach.

Then she congratulated him, and begged him not to forget her entirely amid his grandeur. She was only a plain woman, but she, too, belonged to an ancient knightly race, and therefore he need not be ashamed of his mother's blood.

Lastly, at Wolf's desire, she requested her son to thank the lady who so lovingly filled her place to him.

Her friend was to give this letter himself to Don John of Austria, and he voluntarily promised to lead the high-minded boy to the belief that his own mother had also been worthy of an Emperor's love.

Lastly, Wolf promised to inform her of any important event in her son's life or his own. During the last hour of their meeting he admitted that he was one of the few who felt satisfied with their lot. True, he could not say that he had no wishes; but up to this hour he had desired nothing more constantly and longingly than to hear her sing once more, as in that never-to-be-forgotten May in the Ratisbon home. He might now hope, sooner or later, to have this wish, too, fulfilled. These were kind, cheering words, and with a grateful ebullition of feeling she admitted that, after his glad tidings, she, too, again felt capable of believing in a happy future.

So the friends from childhood bade each other farewell.

CHAPTER XVIII.

During the following days Barbara's life path was illumined by the reflection of the happiness bestowed by the wonderful change in the fate of her child of sorrow, who now promised to become a giver of joy to her.

Doubtless during the ensuing years many dark shadows fell upon her existence and her heart; but when everything around and within was gloomy, she only needed to think of the son whom she had given the Emperor, and the constantly increasing brilliancy of his career, to raise her head with fresh confidence. Yet the cloud obscuring her happiness which she found it hardest to bear proceeded directly from him.

He had probably mentioned her to his royal brother, and revenues had been granted her far exceeding poor Wawerl's dreams, and doubtless a reflection of the admiration which her son earned fell upon her, and her pride was greatly increased. Moreover, she could again devote herself without fear to her ardently beloved art, for even honest old Appenzelder declared that he liked to listen to her, though her voice still lacked much of the overpowering magic of former days. She was in a position, too, to gratify many a taste for whose satisfaction she had often yearned, yet she could not attain a genuine and thorough new sense of happiness.

The weeks which, a few years after her John's recognition, she spent with self-sacrificing devotion beside her husband's couch of pain, which was to become his deathbed, passed amid anxiety and grief, and when her affectionate, careful nursing proved vain, and Pyramus died, deep and sincere sorrow overpowered her. True, he had not succeeded in winning her to return his tender love; but after he had closed his eyes she realized for the first time what a wealth of goodness and fidelity was buried with him and lost to her forever.

Her youngest boy, soon after his father's death, was torn from her by falling into a cistern, and she yielded herself to such passionate grief for his loss that she thought she could never conquer it; but it was soon soothed by the belief that, for the sake of this devout child, whose training for a religious life had already commenced, Heaven had resigned its claims upon John, and that the boy was dwelling in the immediate presence of the Queen of Heaven.

Thus, ere she was aware of it, her burning anguish changed into a cheerful remembrance. Earlier still---more than two years after Wolf's departure---tidings closely associated with the sorrow inflicted through her John had saddened her. The ship which was to bear the loyal companion of her youth to Spain was wrecked just before the end of the voyage,

and Wolf went down with it. Barbara learned the news only by accident, and his death first made her realize with full distinctness how dear he had been to her.

The letter which she had addressed to her son was lost with the man in whom Fate had wrested from her the last friend who would have been able and willing to show her John clearly and kindly a correct picture of his mother's real character.

For two years she had hoped that Wolf would complete her letter in his own person, and tell her son how her voice and her beauty had won his father's heart. Quijada had known it; but if he spoke of her to his wife and foster-son, it was scarcely in her favour---he cared little for music and singing.

So the loss of this letter seemed to her, with reason, a severe misfortune. What she now wrote to John could hardly exert much influence upon him. Yet she did write, this time with the aid of Hannibal. But the new letter, which began with thanks for the financial aid which the son had conferred upon his mother through his royal brother, was distasteful both to her pride and her maternal affection. Half prosaic, half far too effusive, it gave a distorted idea of her real feelings, and she tore it up before giving it to the messenger.

Yet she did not cease to hope that, in some favourable hour, the heart of the idol of her soul would urge him to approach his mother; but year after year elapsed without bringing her even the slightest token of his remembrance, and this omission was the bitter drop that spoiled the happiness which, after the death of her youngest boy, was clouded by no outward event.

When at last she addressed herself to John in a third letter, which this time she dictated to Hannibal as her heart prompted, she received an answer, it is true, though not from him, but from Dona Magdalena.

In kind words this lady urged her not to write to "her"---Dona Magdalena's---son in future. She had taught him to think of the woman who bore him with fitting respect, but it would be impossible for him to maintain the relation with her. She must spare her the explanation of the reasons which made this appear to be an obstacle to his career. Don John would prove in the future, by his care for her prosperity and comfort, that he did not forget her. She had no right, it is true, to counsel her; but when she transported herself into the soul of the woman who had enjoyed the love of the Emperor Charles, and on whom Heaven had bestowed a son like John of Austria, she felt sure that this woman would act wisely and promote her real welfare if she preferred communion with her Saviour, in the quiet of a cloister, to the bustle of life amid surroundings which certainly were far too humble for her.

Barbara felt wounded to the inmost depths of her being by this letter. Had the officious adviser, who had certainly despatched the reply without her son's knowledge, been within her reach, she would have showed her how little inclination she felt to be patronized by the person who, after alienating the son's heart from his mother, even presumed to dictate to her to rob herself of her last claim upon his regard.

True, in one respect she agreed with the writer of the letter.

Precisely because it appeared as if Heaven had accepted her sacrifice and the grandeur for which she had made it seemed to be awaiting her son, she ought to attempt nothing that might impede his climbing to the height, and her open connection with him might easily have placed stones in his path. His elevation depended upon King Philip, whose boundless pride had gazed at her from his chilling face.

So she resolved to make no more advances to her child until the day came ---and a voice within told her that come it must---when he himself longed for his own mother. Meanwhile she would be content with the joy of watching his

brilliant course from the distance.

The miracles which she had anticipated and prayed for in his behalf were accomplished. First, she heard that Count Ribadavia's splendid palace would be prepared for her son, that the sons of noble families would be assigned to attend him, and that a body-guard of Spaniards and Germans and a train of his own were at his command.

Then she learned in what a remarkable manner Elizabeth of Valois, the King's new wife, favoured the lad of thirteen. At the taking of the oath by which the Cortes recognised Don Carlos as the heir to the throne, John had been summoned directly after the Infant as the first person entitled to homage.

Next, she learned that he had entered the famous University of Alcala de Henares.

And his classmates and friends? They were no less important personages than Don Carlos himself and Alessandro Farnese, John's nephew, the son of that Ottavio at whose admission as Knight of the Golden Fleece Barbara had made at Landshut the most difficult resolution of her life.

He was said to share everything with these distinguished companions, and to be himself the handsomest and most attractive of the illustrious trio. He was particularly inseparable from Alessandro, the son of the woman now ruling as regent in Brussels, who was John's sister.

What reply would he have made to this illustrious scion of one of the most ancient and noble royal races if a letter from her had reached him, and the duke's son had asked, "Who is this Frau Barbara Blomberg?" or, as she now signed herself, "Madame de Blomberg"?

The answer must have been: "My mother."

Oh, no, no, never!

It would have been cruel to expect this from him; never would she place her beloved child, her pride, her joy, in so embarrassing a position.

Besides, though she could only watch him from a distance, thanks to his generosity or his brother's, she could lead a pleasant life. To sun herself in his glory, too, was sufficiently cheering, and must satisfy her.

He spent three years at the University of Alcala, and nothing but good news of him reached her. Then she received tidings which gave her special joy, for one of the wishes she had formed in Landshut was fulfilled. He had been made a Knight of the Golden Fleece, and how becoming the jewel on the red ribbon must be to the youth of one-and-twenty! How many of her acquaintances belonging to the partisans of the King and Spain came to congratulate her upon it! Because John had become Spanish, and risen in Spain to the position which she desired for him, she wished to become so, and studied the Spanish language with the zeal and industry of a young girl. She succeeded in gaining more and more knowledge of it, and, finally, through intercourse with Spaniards, in mastering it completely.

At that time the prospects for her party were certainly gloomy; the heretical agitation and the boldness of the rebellious enthusiasts for independence and liberty surpassed all bounds.

The King therefore sent the Duke of Alba to the Netherlands to restore order, and, with the twenty thousand men he commanded, make the insurgents feel the resistless power of offended majesty and the angered Church.

Barbara and her friends greeted the stern duke as a noble champion of the faith, who was resolved to do his utmost. The new bishoprics, which by Granvelle's advice had been established, the foreign soldiers, and the Spanish Inquisition, which pursued the heretics with inexorable harshness, had roused the populace to unprecedented turmoil, and induced them to resist the leading nobles, who were indebted to the King for great favours, to the intense wrath of these aristocrats and the partisans of Spain.

Barbara, with all her party, had welcomed the new bishoprics as an arrangement which promised many blessings, and the foreign troops seemed to her necessary to maintain order in the rebellious Netherlands. The cruelty of the Inquisition was only intended to enforce respect for the edicts which the Emperor Charles, in his infallible wisdom, had issued, and the hatred which the nobles, especially, displayed against Granvelle, Barbara's kind patron, the greatest statesman of his time and the most loyal servant of his King, seemed to her worthy of the utmost condemnation.

The scorn with which the rebels, after the compromise signed by the highest nobles, had called themselves Geusen, or Beggars, and endangered repose, would have been worthy of the severest punishment. What induced these people to risk money and life for privileges which a wise policy of the government---this was the firm conviction of those who shared Barbara's views---could not possibly grant, was incomprehensible to her, and she watched the course of the rebels with increasing aversion. Did they suppose their well-fed magistrates and solemn States-General, who never looked beyond their own city and country, would govern them better than the far-sighted wisdom of a Granvelle or the vast intellect of a Viglius, which comprised all the knowledge of the world?

What they called their liberties were privileges which a sovereign bestowed. Ought they to wonder if another monarch, whom they had deeply angered, did not regard them as inviolable gifts of God? The quiet comfort of former days had been clouded, nay, destroyed, by these patriots. Peace could be restored only by the King's silencing them. So she wished the Spaniards a speedy success, and detested the efforts of independent minds; above all, of William of Orange, their only too clear-sighted, cautious, devoted leader, also skilled in the arts of dissimulation, in whom she recognised the most dangerous foe of Spanish sovereignty and the unity of the Church.

When, by the Duke of Alba's orders, the Counts Egmont and Horn were executed one June day in the market place of Brussels, opinions, even of members of the Spanish party, were divided, especially as Count Egmont was a Catholic, and had acted finally according to the views of the government.

Barbara sincerely lamented his terrible end, for she had seen in him a brilliant model for her John. In hours of depression, the sudden fall of this favourite of the people seemed like an evil omen. But she would not let these disquieting thoughts gain power over her, for she wished at last to enjoy life and, as the mother of such a son, felt entitled to do so.

She regarded this cruel deed of Alba as a false step at any rate, for, though she kept so far aloof from the Netherland burghers and common people, she perceived what deep indignation this measure aroused.

Meanwhile the Prince of Orange, the spirit and soul of this execrable rebellion, had escaped the sentence of the court.

Nevertheless, she regarded Alba with great admiration, for he was a man of ability, whom the Emperor Charles had held in high esteem. Besides, after her husband's death the haughty noble had been courteous enough to assure her of his sympathy.

Moreover, a time was just approaching in which she withdrew too far from this conflict to follow it with full attention, for her son's first deed of heroism became known in Brussels.

The King had appointed John to the command of the fleet, and sent him against the pirates upon the African coast. He could now gather his first laurels, and to do everything in her power for the success of his arms, Barbara spent the greater portion of her time in church, praying devoutly. In September he was greeted in Madrid as a conqueror, but her joy was not unclouded; for the Infant Don Carlos had yielded up his young life in July as a prisoner, and she believed him to be her John's best friend, and lamented his death because she thought that it would grieve her hero son.

But this little cloud soon vanished, and how brilliantly the blue sky arched above her the next year, when she learned that Don John of Austria had received the honourable commission of crushing the rebellion of the infidel Moriscoes in Andalusia! Here her royal son first proved himself a glorious military hero, and his deeds at the siege of Galera and before Seron filled her maternal heart with inexpressible pride. The words which he shouted to his retreating men: "Do you call yourselves Spaniards and not know what honour means? What have you to fear when I am with you?" echoed in her ears like the most beautiful melody which she had ever stung or heard.

Yet a dark shadow fell on these radiant joys also; her John's friend and foster-father, Don Luis Quijada, had been wounded in these battles, and died from his injuries. Barbara felt what deep pain this would cause her distant son, and expressed her sympathy to him in a letter.

But the greatest happiness was still in store for her and for him. On the 7th of October, 1571, the young hero, now twenty-four years old, as commander of the united fleets of Spain, Venice, and the Pope, gained the greatest victory which any Castilian force had ever won over the troops of the infidels.

Instead of the name received at his baptism, and the one which he owed to his brother, that of Victor of Lepanto now adorned him. Not one of all the generals in the world received honours even distantly approaching those lavished upon him. And besides the leonine courage and talent for command which he had displayed, his noble nature was praised with ardent enthusiasm. How he had showed it in the distribution of the booty to the widow of the Turkish high admiral Ali Pasha! This renowned Moslem naval commander had fallen in the battle, and his two sons had been delivered to Don John as prisoners. When the unfortunate mother entreated him to release the boys for a large ransom, he restored one to her love with the companions for whose liberty he had interceded, with a letter containing the words, "It does not beseem me to keep your presents, since my rank and birth require me to give, not to receive."

These noble words were written by Barbara Blomberg's son, the boy to whom she gave birth, and who had now become just what her lofty soul desired.

After the conquest of Cyprus, the Crescent had seriously threatened the Cross in the Mediterranean, and it was Don John who had broken the power of the Turks.

Alas, that her father could not have lived to witness this exploit of his grandson! What a happy man the victory of Lepanto, gained by his "Wawerl's" son, would have made him! How the fearless old champion of the faith would have rejoiced in this grandchild, his deeds, and nature!

And what honours were bestowed upon her John!

King Philip wrote to him, "Next to God, gratitude for what has been accomplished is due to you." A statue was erected to him in Messina. The Pope had used the words of Scripture, "There was a man sent by God, and his name was John." Now, yes, now she was more than rewarded for the sacrifice of Landshut; now the splendour and grandeur for which she had longed and prayed was far, far exceeded.

This time it was gratitude, fervent gratitude, which detained her in church. The child of her love, her suffering, her pride, was now happy, must be happy.

When, two years later, Don John captured Tunis, the exploit could no longer increase his renown.

At this time also happened many things which filled the heart of a woman so closely connected with royalty sometimes with joy, sometimes with anxiety.

In Paris, the night of St. Bartholomew, a year after her son had chastised the Moslems at Lepanto, dealt the French heretics a deep, almost incurable wound, and in the Netherlands there were not gallows enough to hang the misguided fanatics.

Yet this rebellious nation did not cease to cause the King unspeakable difficulties and orthodox Christians sorrow. On the sea the "Beggars" conquered his Majesty's war ships; Haarlem, it is true, had been forced by the Spanish troops to surrender, but what terrible sacrifices the siege had cost where women had taken part in the defence with the courage of men!

And, in spite of everything, Alba's harshness had been futile.

Then Philip recalled him and put in his place the gentle Don Luis de Requesens, who had been governor in Milan. He would willingly have made peace with the people bleeding from a thousand wounds, but how could he concede the toleration of the heretical faith and the withdrawal of the troops on which he relied? And how did the rebels show their gratitude to him for his kindness and good will?

The Beggars destroyed his fleet, and, though the brother of William of Orange had been defeated upon the Mooker-Heide, this by no means disheartened the enraged nation, resolved upon extremes, and their silent but wise and tireless leader.

In Leyden the obstinacy of the foes of the King and the Church showed itself in a way to which even Barbara and her party could not deny a certain degree of admiration. True, the nature of the country aided the rebels like an ally. Mortal warriors could not contend against wind and storm. But he who from without directed the defence here, who had issued the order to break through the dikes, and then with shameful effrontery had founded in the scarcely rescued city a university which was to nurture the spirit of resistance in the minds of the young men, was again the Prince of Orange; and who else than he, his shrewdness and firmness, robbed Requesens of gratitude for his mildness and the success of his honest labours?

But how much easier was the part of the leader of the enemy, who in Brussels had escaped the fate of Egmont, than the King's kindly disposed governor! When Barbara chanced to hear the men of the people talking with each other, and they spoke of "Father William," they meant the Prince of Orange; and with what abuse, both verbally and in handbills, King Philip and the Spanish Government were loaded!

To Barbara, as well as to the members of her party, William of Orange, whom she often heard called the "Antichrist" and "rebel chief," was an object of hatred. Now he frustrated the kind Requesens's attempt at mediation, and it was also his fault that two provinces had publicly revolted from the Holy Church. The Protestant worship of God was now exercised as freely there as in Ratisbon. Like William of Orange, most of the citizens professed the doctrine of Calvin, but there was no lack of Lutherans, and the clergyman whose sermons attracted the largest congregations was Erasmus Eckhart, Barbara's old acquaintance, Dr. Hiltner's foster-son, who during the Emperor Charles's reign had come to the Netherlands as an army chaplain, and, amid great perils, was said to have lured thousands from the Catholic Church. Deeply as her

sentiments rebelled, here, too, Barbara had become his preserver; for when the Bloody Council had sentenced him to the gallows, she had succeeded, with great difficulty, through her manifold relations to the heads of the Spanish party, in obtaining his pardon. A grateful letter from Frau Sabina Hiltner had abundantly repaid her for these exertions.

The boldness with which William of Orange, who was himself the most dangerous heretic and rebel, protested that he was willing to grant every one full religious liberty, had no desire to injure the Catholic Church in any way, and was even ready to acknowledge the supremacy of the King, could not fail to enrage every pious Catholic and faithful subject of King Philip.

To spoil a Requesens's game was no difficult task for the man who, though by no means as harmless as the dove, was certainly as wise as the serpent; but that the Duke of Alba, the tried, inflexible commander, had been obliged to yield and retire vanquished before the little, merry, industrious, thoroughly peaceful nation which intrusted itself to the leadership of William of Orange, had been too much for her and, when it happened, seemed like a miracle.

What spirits were aiding the Prince of Orange to resist the King and the power of the Church so successfully? He was in league with hell, her old confessor said, and there were rumours that his Majesty was trying to have the abominable mischief-maker secretly put out of the world. But this would have been unworthy of a King, and Barbara would not believe it.

In the northern provinces the Spanish power was only a shadow, but in the southern ones also hatred of the Spaniards was already bursting into flames, and Requesens was too weak to extinguish them.

The King and Barbara's political friends perceived that Alba's pitiless, murderous severity had injured the cause of the crown and the Church far more than it had benefited them. Personally, he had treated her on the whole kindly, but he had inflicted two offences which were hard to conquer. In the first place, he urged her to leave Brussels and settle in Mons; and, secondly, he had refused to receive her Conrad, who had grown up into a steady, good-looking, but in no respect remarkable young man, in one of his regiments, with the prospect of promotion to the rank of officer.

In both cases she had not remained quiet and, at the second audience which the duke gave her, her hot blood, though it had grown so much cooler, played her a trick, and she became involved in a vehement argument with him. In the course of this he had been compelled to be frank, and she now knew that Alba had persuaded her to change her residence at the King's desire, and why it was done.

She afterward learned from acquaintances that the duke had said one was apt to be the loser in a dispute with her; yet she had yielded, though solely and entirely to benefit her John, but she could not help confessing to herself that her residence in the capital could not be agreeable to him. The highest Spanish officials and military commanders lived there, as well as the ambassadors of foreign powers, and it was not desirable to remind them of the maternal descent of the general who now belonged to the King's family.

The case was somewhat similar, as Alba himself had confessed to her, with regard to her son Conrad's promotion to the rank of an officer; for if he attained that position he might, as the brother of Don John of Austria, make pretensions which threatened to place the hero of Lepanto in a false, nay, perhaps unpleasant position. This, too, she did not desire. But in removing from Brussels she had possibly rendered Don John a greater service than she admitted to herself, for, since her son's brilliant successes had made her happy and her external circumstances had permitted it, she had emerged from the miserable seclusion of former years.

Her dress, too, she now suited to the position which she arrogated to herself. But in doing so she had become a personage who could scarcely be overlooked, and she rarely failed to be present on the very occasions which brought

together the most aristocratic Spanish society in Brussels.

So, after a fresh dispute with Alba, in which the victor on many a battlefield was forced to yield, she had obtained his consent to retire to Ghent instead of *Mons*.

True, the duke would have preferred to induce her to go to Spain, and tried to persuade her to do so by the assurance that the King himself desired to receive her there.

But she had been warned.

Through Hannibal Melas and other members of her own party she had learned that Philip intended, if she came to Spain, to remove her from the eyes of the world by placing her in a convent, and never had she felt less inclination to take the veil.

Her departure from Brussels had done Alba and his functionaries a service, for she had constantly forced herself into the government building to obtain news of her son.

The great and opulent city of Ghent, the birthplace of the Emperor Charles, of which he had once said to Francis I, the King of France, that Paris would go into his glove (Gant), had been chosen by Barbara for several reasons. The principal one was that she would find there several old friends of former days, one of whom, her singing-master Feys, had promised to accept her voice and enable her to serve her art again with full pleasure.

The other was Hannibal Melas, who before Granvelle's fall had been transferred there as one of the higher officials of the government.

She also entered into relations with other heads of the Spanish party, and thus found in Ghent what she sought. The pension allowed her enabled her to hire a pretty house, and to furnish it with a certain degree of splendour. A companion, for whom she selected an elderly unmarried lady who belonged to an impoverished noble family, accompanied her in her walks; a major-domo governed the four men-servants and the maids of the household; Frau Lamperi retained her position as lady's maid; the steward and cook attended to the kitchen and the cellar; and two pages, with a pretty one-horse carriage, lent an air of elegance to her style of living.

For the religious service, which was directed by her own chaplain, she had had a chapel fitted up in the house, according to the Ratisbon fashion. The poor were never turned from her door without alms, and where she encountered great want she often relieved it with a generosity far beyond her means. Under the instruction of Maestro Feys, she eagerly devoted herself to new exercises in singing. Doubtless she realized that time and the long period of hoarseness had seriously injured her voice, but even now she could compare with the best singers in the city.

Thus Barbara saw her youthful dreams of fortune realized---nay, surpassed ---and in the consciousness of liberty which she now enjoyed, elevated by the success gained by the person she loved best, she again followed her lover's motto. With the impelling "More, farther" before her eyes, she took care that she did not lack the admiration for which she had never ceased to long, and to which, in better days, she had possessed so well-founded a claim.

Now a lavish and gracious hospitality, as well as her relationship to the greatest and most popular hero of his time, must give her what she had formerly obtained through her art; for she rarely sang in large companies, and when she did so, no matter how loudly her hearers expressed their delight, she could not regain the old confident security that she was justly entitled to it. But she could believe all the more firmly that the acknowledgments of pleasure which she reaped from her little evening parties were sincere. They even gained a certain degree of celebrity, for the kitchen in her house was

admirably managed, and whatever came from it found approval even in the home of the finest culinary achievements. But it was especially the freedom---though not the slightest indecorum was permitted---with which people met at "Madame de Blomberg's," as she now styled herself, that lent her house so great an attraction, and finally added the more aristocratic members of her party to the number of her guests.

The very different elements assembled in her home were united by Barbara's unaffected vivacity and frank, enthusiastic temperament, receptive to the veriest trifle. These evening entertainments rarely lacked music; but she had learned to retire into the background, and when there were talented artists among her guests she gave them the precedence. The way in which she understood how to discover and bring out the best qualities of every visitor rendered her a very agreeable hostess.

Maestro Feys made her acquainted with his professional friends in Ghent, and her opinion of music was soon highly valued among them. Where women choirs were being trained, she was asked to join them, and often took a part which seemed to the others too difficult. Thus Barbara was heard and known in larger circles, and she had the pleasure of hearing her admirable training and excellent method of delivery praised by the director of the choir of the Cathedral of Saint Bavon, one of the greatest musicians in the Netherlands. But it afforded her special gratification when a choir of Catholic women chose her for their leader. She devoted a large portion of her time and strength to it, and felt honoured and elevated by its progress and admirable performances.

Although nearly fifty, she was still a very fine-looking woman. The few silver threads which now mingled in her hair were skilfully concealed by Lamperi's art, and few ladies in Ghent were more tastefully and richly apparelled.

Among the guests who thronged to her house there was no lack of elderly gentlemen who would gladly have married the vivacious, unusual woman, who was so nearly connected with the royal family, and lived in such luxurious style.

Never had she had more suitors than at this time; but she had learned the meaning of a loveless marriage, and her heart still belonged to the one man to whom, notwithstanding the deep wounds he had inflicted, she owed a brief but peerlessly sublime happiness.

She could not even have bestowed upon her husband the alms of a sincere interest, for, in spite of the increasing number of social and musical engagements which filled her life, one thought alone occupied the depths of her soul---her John, his renown, grandeur, and honour.

Her son Conrad had no cause to complain of lack of affection from his mother, but the victor of Lepanto was to her the all-animating sun, the former only a friendly little star. Besides, she rarely saw him now, as he was studying in Lowen.

As she had modelled her housekeeping after that of the Castilian nobles, and her guests almost exclusively belonged to the royal party, she also sought Spanish houses or those of the city magistrates who were partisans of the King.

News of her son would be most fully supplied there, and many an officer whom she met had served under her John, and willingly told the mother what he admired and had learned from him. The young Duke of Ferdinandina, a Spanish colonel, who had studied with John in Alcalá, and then fought by his side at the conquest of Tunis, stirred her heart most deeply by his enthusiastic admiration for the comrade who was his superior in every respect.

All the pictures of Don John, the young officer who had shared his tent declared, gave a very faint idea of his wonderful beauty and bewitching chivalrous grace. Not only women's hearts rushed to him; his frank, lovable nature also won men. As a rider in the tournament, in games of ball and quarter staff, he had no peer; for his magnificently formed body was like steel, and he himself had seen Don John share in playing racket for six hours in succession with the utmost

eagerness, and then show no more fatigue than a fish does in water. But he was also sure of success where proof of intellect must be given. He did not understand where Don John had found time to learn to speak French, German, and Italian. Moreover, he was thoroughly the great noble. On the pilgrimage which he made to Loreto he had distributed more than ten thousand ducats among the poor. The piety and charity which distinguished him---he had told him so himself---owed to the lady who reared him, the widow of the never-to-be-forgotten Don Luis Quijada. His eye filled with tears when he spoke of her. But even she, Barbara, could not love him more tenderly or faithfully than this admirable woman. Up to the day she insisted upon supplying his body linen. The finest linen spun and woven in Villagarcia was used for the purpose, and the sewing was done by her own skilful hands. Nothing of importance befel him that he did not discuss with Tia in long letters.--[*"Tia,"* the Spanish word for aunt.]

Barbara had listened to the young Spaniard with joyous emotion until, at the last communication, her heart contracted again.

How much that by right was hers this worm snatched, as it were, from her lips! What delight it would also have given her to provide her son's linen, and how much finer was the Flanders material than that made at Villagarcia! how much more artistically wrought were Mechlin and Brusse laces than those of Valladolid or Barcelona!

And the letters!

How many Dona Magdalena probably possessed! But she had not yet beheld a single pen stroke from her son's hand.

Yet she thanked the enthusiastic young panegyrist for his news, and the emotion of displeasure which for a short time destroyed her joy melted like mist before the sun when he closed with the assurance that, no matter how much he thought and pondered, he could find neither spot nor stain the brilliantly pure character of her son, irradiated by nobility of nature, the favour of fortune, and renown.

The already vivid sense of happiness which filled her was strongly enhanced by this description of the personality of her child and, in a period which saw so many anxious and troubled faces in the Netherlands, a sunny radiance brightened hers.

She felt rejuvenated, and the acquaintances and friends who declared that no one would suppose her to be much older than her famous son, whose age was known to the whole world, were not guilty of undue exaggeration.

Heaven, she thought, would pour its favour upon her too lavishly if the report that Don John was to be appointed Governor of the Netherlands should be verified.

It was not in Barbara's nature to shut such a wealth of joy into her own heart, and never had her house been more frequently opened to guests, never had her little entertainments been more brilliant, never since the time of her recovery had the music of her voice been more beautiful than in the days which followed the sudden death of the governor, Requesens.

Meanwhile she had scarcely noticed how high the longing for liberty was surging in the Netherland nation, and with how fierce a glow hatred of the Spanish tyrants was consuming the hearts of the people.

But even Barbara was roused from her ecstasy of happiness when she heard of the atrocities that threatened the provinces.

What did it avail that the King meanwhile left the government to the Council of State in Brussels? Even furious foes of Spain desired to see a power which could be relied upon at the head of the community, even though it were a tool of the abhorred King. The danger was so terrible that it could not fail to alarm and summon to the common defence every individual, no matter to what party he might belong; for the unpaid Spanish regiments, with unbridled violence, rioting and seeking booty, capable of every crime, every shameful deed, obedient only to their own savage impulses, were already entering Brabant.

Now many a Spanish partisan also hoped for deliverance from the Prince of Orange, but he took advantage of the favour of circumstances in behalf of the great cause of liberty. The "Spanish" in Ghent heard with terror that all the heads of the royalist party who were at the helm of government had been captured, that province after province had revolted, and would no longer bow to the despot. Philip of Croy, Duke of Aerschot, had been appointed military governor of Brabant.

The inhabitants of Ghent now saw the States-General meet within the walls of their city, in order, as every other support failed, to appeal for aid to foreign powers, and entreat "Father William," who could do everything, to guard the country from the rebellious soldiery. Even those who favoured Spain now relied upon his never-failing shrewdness and energy until the King sent the right man.

Then the rumour that King Philip would send his brother Don John of Austria, that, as his regent, he might reconcile the contending parties, strengthened into authentic news, and not only the Spanish partisans hailed it with joyous hope, for the reputation of military ability, as well as of a noble nature, preceded the victor of Lepanto.

Barbara received these tidings through the distinguished City Councillor Rassingham, who invited her for the first time to a meeting of the Spanish party in his magnificent home---an honour bestowed, in addition to herself, upon only a few women belonging to the highest social circles, and which she probably owed to the summons to Don John. The members of the States-General who favoured the King were also to be present at this assembly, and a banquet would follow the political discussions. This invitation promised to lend fresh distinction to her social position, and open a sphere of activity which suited her taste.

The King's cause was hers, and to be permitted to work for it gained a special charm by her son's appointment to be governor of the country, which filled her with mingled anxiety and joy. If he were regent, every service which she rendered the party would benefit him personally.

Yet it was not perfectly easy for her to accept Rassingham's invitation.

Nothing could be more desirable and flattering than to obtain admittance to this house, from which all foreign and doubtful elements were excluded with special care, but she would be obliged to remain there until late at night, and this was difficult to reconcile with certain duties she had undertaken.

Her old music teacher, Feys, to whom she was so much indebted, had been attacked by slow fever, and she had received him in her house five days ago, and provided with loving devotion for his nursing. The bachelor of seventy had been so ill cared for in his lonely, uncomfortable home that her kind heart had urged her to take charge of him.

She had left him only a few hours since he had been under her roof, and if the banquet at the Rassinghams, after the deliberations, lasted until a very late hour, she would, for the sake of her invalid guest, great as was the sacrifice, attend only the former.

Yet she was pleased at the thought of sharing this festal assembly, and she, her companion, and Lamperi all went into ecstasies over the dress she intended to wear, which had just arrived from Brussels.

Maestro Feys passed a restless night, and Barbara watched beside his couch for hours. In the morning she allowed herself a little sleep, but she was obliged at noon to dress for the assembly, which was to begin before sunset.

She had just sat down to have her hair arranged, which occupied a long time, when one of the pages handed her a letter brought by a mounted courier.

She opened it curiously, and while reading it her cheeks paled and flushed as in the days of her youth. Then it dropped into her lap, and for a moment she remained motionless, with closed eyes, as though stupefied.

Then, rising quickly, she again read the violet-scented missive, written on the finest parchment.

"Your son," ran the brief contents---"your son, who has so long been separated from his mother, at last desires to look into her eyes. If the woman who gave him birth wishes to make him feel new and deep gratitude, let her hasten at once to Luxemburg, where he has been for several hours in the deepest privacy. The weal and woe of his life are at stake."

The letter, written in the German language, was signed "John of Austria."

Panting for breath, Barbara gazed a long time into vacancy. Then, suddenly drawing herself up proudly, she exclaimed to Lamperi: "I'll dress my hair myself. Yesterday Herr De la Porta offered me his travelling carriage. The major-domo must go to him at once and say that Madame de Blomberg asks the loan of the vehicle. Let the page Diego order post and courier horses at the same time. The carriage must be ready in an hour."

"But, Madame," cried the maid, raising her hands in alarm and admonition, "the Rassinghams are expecting you. The honour! Every one who is well disposed in the States-General will be there. Who knows what the party has in store for you? And then the banquet! What may there not be to hear!"

"No matter," replied Barbara. "The chaplain---I'll speak to him---must send the refusal. No summons from Heaven could be more powerful than the call that takes me away. Bestir yourself! There is not an instant to lose."

Frau Lamperi retired with drooping head. But when she had executed her mistress's orders and returned, Barbara laid her hand upon her shoulder, whispering: "You can keep silence. I am going to Luxemburg. He who calls me is one whom you saw enter the world, the hero of Lepanto. He wants his mother. At last! at last! And I---"

Here tears stifled her voice, and obeying the desire to pour out to another the overflowing gratitude and love which had taken possession of her soul, she threw herself upon the gray-haired attendant's breast, and amid her weeping exclaimed: "I shall see him with these eyes, I can clasp his hand, I shall hear his voice---that voice---His first cry---A thousand times, waking and sleeping, I have fancied I heard it again. Do you remember how they took him from me, Lamperi?"

"To think that I survived it! But now---now If that voice lured me to the deepest abyss and called me away from paradise, I would go!"

The maid's old eyes also overflowed, and when Barbara read her son's letter aloud, she cried: "Of course there can be no delay, even if, instead of the Rassinghams, King Philip himself should send for you. And I---may I go with you? Oh, Madame, you do not know what a sweet little angel he was from his very birth! We were not allowed to show him to you. And it was wise, for, had you seen him, it would have broken your poor mother heart to give him up."

She sobbed aloud as she spoke. Barbara permitted her to accompany her, though she had intended to take her companion, and would have preferred to travel with the woman of noble birth.

Besides, she could have confided the care of her sick guest to Lamperi more confidently than to the other. But the faithful old soul's wish to see the boy whose entrance into the world she had been permitted to greet was too justifiable for her to be able to refuse it.

How much Barbara had to do before her departure! Most of the time was consumed by the suffering maestro and the arrangements which she had to make for him. She did not leave his bedside until the arrival of the sister who was to assist her companion in nursing her old friend until her return. She certainly would not be absent long; the important things John had to say might probably require great haste, while, on the contrary, whatever needed time for execution could be comfortably despatched during his stay in the Netherlands. So she assured Feys, who regarded her as his good angel and felt her departure painfully, that she would soon be with him again, and then gave the order to ask Hannibal Melas, in her name, to pay frequent visits to the sick maestro. It was very hard for her to leave him and neglect the duties which she had undertaken, but in the presence of the summons addressed to her every other consideration must be silent.

When Barbara returned to her own apartments Lamperi was still busied with the packing.

Several dresses---first of all the new Brussels gown and its belongings, even the pomegranate blossoms which the garden city of Ghent had supplied as something rare in November for her mistress's adornment---were placed carefully in the largest trunk, while Barbara, overpowered by inexpressible restlessness, paced the room with hasty steps from side to side.

Only when one or another article was taken from a casket or box did she pause in her walk. Among the things selected was the pearl necklace which Charles had given her, and the only note her royal lover had ever written, which ran, "This evening, quia amore langueo." This she laid with her own hand among the laces and pomegranate blossoms, for this cry of longing might teach her son what she had once been to his father. When John had seen her and felt how clear he was to her, he must become aware that he had another mother besides the Spanish lady whom he called "Tia," and who made his underclothing; then he could no more forget her than that other woman.

Lastly, she summoned the major-domo and told him what he must do during her absence, which she thought would not exceed a week at the utmost. The guests invited for Wednesday must be notified; the women's choir must be requested to excuse her non-appearance; Sir Jasper Gordon, her most faithful admirer, an elderly Englishman, must learn that she had gone away; but, above all, writing tablet in hand, she directed him how to provide for her poor, what assistance every individual should receive, or the sums of money and wood which were to be sent to other houses to provide for the coming winter. She also placed money at the majordomo's disposal for any very needy persons who might apply for help while she was out of reach.

Before the November sun had set she entered the La Porta travelling carriage. The chaplain, whom she referred to the major-domo for any matters connected with the poor, gave his blessing to the departing traveller, whose cheerful vivacity, after so many severe trials, he admired, and whose "golden heart," as he expressed it, had made her dear to him. The servants gathered at the door of the house, bowing silently, and her "Farewell, till we meet again!" fell from her lips with joyous confidence.

While on the way she reflected, for the first time, what John could desire of her for the "weal and woe of his life." It was impossible to guess, yet whatever it might be she would not fail him.

But what could it be'

Neither during the long night journey nor by the light of day did she find a satisfactory answer. True, she had not thought solely of her son's entreaty. Her whole former life passed before her.

How much she had sinned and erred! But all that she had done for the man to whom the posthorses were swiftly bearing her seemed to her free from reproach and blameless. Every act and feeling which he had received from her had been the best of which she was capable.

Not a day, scarcely an hour, had she forgotten him; for his sake she had endured great anguish willingly, and, in spite of his mute reserve---she could say so to herself---without any bitter feeling. How she had suffered in parting from her child she alone knew. Fate had raised her son to the summit of earthly grandeur and saved him from every clanger. Providence had adorned him with its choicest gifts. When she thought of the last account of him from the Duke of Ferdinandina, it seemed to her as if his life had hitherto resembled a triumphal procession, a walk through blooming gardens.

What could he mean by the "woe" after the "weal"?

John was to her the embodied fulfilment of the most ardent prayers. The blessings she had besought for him, and for which she had placed her own heart on the rack, had become his-glory and splendour, fame and honour.

She had not been able to give them to him, and undoubtedly he owed much to his own powers and to the favour of his royal brother, but Barbara was firmly convinced that her prayers had raised him to his present grandeur.

What more could now be given to him? Everything the human heart desires was already his. His happiness was complete, and during recent years this, too, had cheered her heart and restored her lost capacity for the enjoyment of life. She had been carried to the very verge of recklessness whenever bitter grief had oppressed her heart.

Her greatest sorrow had been that she was not permitted to see and embrace him, and the knowledge that another filled the place in his heart which belonged to her; but lesser troubles had also gnawed at her soul.

It had been especially hard to bear that, as the object of the greatest Emperor's love and the mother of his son, she had so long felt that she was reluctantly tolerated, and not really recognised in the circles which should have been hers also. Moreover, the consciousness of exercising an art over which she had once attained a mastery, yet never being able to shake off the painful doubt whether the applause that greeted her performance was genuine, spoiled many a pleasant hour.

Still, all these things had probably been only the tribute which she was compelled to pay for the proud joy of being the mother of such a son.

Now she at last felt safe from these malicious little attacks. She had gained a good social position; she was not only valued as a singer, but always sought wherever the women of Ghent were earnestly pursuing music and singing. The invitation to the Rassinghams flung wide the doors which had formerly been closed against her, and she might be sure of not being deemed the least important among the ladies of her party to whose hearts the cause of King and Church was dear.

When she returned to Ghent, even if Don John had not been appointed governor, she might even have ventured to make her house the rendezvous of the heads of the royalist party.

But now that her son entered the Netherlands as the leader, the representative of the sovereign, to reign in Philip's name, everything she could wish was attained, and his father's "More, farther," had lost all meaning for her.

She could meet her happy son as a happy mother; she said this to herself with a long breath. These thoughts had animated her restless half slumber during the nocturnal drive, and she still dwelt upon them all the following day.

Toward evening they reached Luxemburg. At the gate, where every carriage was stopped, the guards asked her name.

At the reply the inspector of taxes bowed profoundly, and signed to the Spanish officer behind him.

He was waiting for her, by the command of the captain-general, who longed to see her, and with the utmost courtesy undertook the office of guide.

Then the carriage rolled on again, and turned into the magnificent park of a palace, which belonged to the royal governor, Prince Peter Ernst von Mansfeld.

A gentleman dressed in black, whose bright eyes revealed an active mind, while the expression of his well-formed features inspired confidence, Don John's private secretary, Escovedo, of whose shrewdness and fidelity Barbara had often heard, ushered her into the apartments assigned to her.

In two hours, he said, the captain-general would be happy to receive her. He first wished her to rest completely after the fatiguing journey.

Barbara dismissed, without making use of their services, the pages whom he placed at her disposal. The more than luxurious meal which was served soon afterward she scarcely touched; the impetuous throbbing of her heart choked her breathing so that she could scarcely speak to Lamperi.

With eager zeal the maid tried to induce her to put on the fresh and extremely tasteful Brussels gala robe. The candlesticks, with the dozens of candles, the elegant silver dishes, the whole manner of the reception, led her to make the suggestion. But Barbara had scarcely noticed these magnificent things.

Her every thought and feeling centred upon the son whom she was now actually to see with her own eyes, whose hand she would touch, whose voice she would hear.

The splendid costume did not suit such a meeting after a long separation, so solemn a festal hour of the heart.

A heavy black silk which she had brought was more appropriate for this occasion. Only she allowed the pomegranate blossoms, which had remained perfectly fresh, to be fastened on her breast, that her dress might not look like mourning. While Lamperi was putting the last touches to her toilet, a priest came for her, as Escovedo had arranged, exactly two hours after her arrival. This was Father Dorante, Don John's confessor, an elderly man with a face in which earnest piety was so happily mingled with kindly cheerfulness that Barbara rejoiced to know that such a guardian of souls was at her son's side.

While he was descending the stairs with her, Barbara noticed one of the searching glances he secretly cast at her, and wondered what this man's pure, keen eyes had probably discovered.

The spacious apartment into which she was now ushered was hung with costly bright-hued Oriental rugs.

"Gifts from the widow of the Turkish lord high admiral," the priest whispered, pointing to the superb textures, and Barbara nodded. She knew how he had obtained them, but the passionate agitation of her soul deprived her of the power to inform the monk of this knowledge, of which probably she would usually have boasted to a friend of her son so

worthy of all respect.

The folding doors of the adjoining room were open. Surely John was there, and how gladly she would have rushed toward it! But the confessor asked her to sit down, as the captain-general still had several orders to give. Then he entered the other room.

Barbara, panting for breath, looked after him and, as she glanced through the open door, it seemed as though her heart stood still.

Yonder aristocratic gentleman, in the full prime of youthful beauty, must be her son.

The man from whom she had so long been parted looked like the apparition of the Count Egmont, at whom she had once gazed full of admiration, with the wish that her John might resemble him; only she thought her John, with his open brow and floating, waving golden locks, far handsomer than the unfortunate victor of St. Quentin and Gravelines.

How noble and yet how easy was the bearing of the dignitary, who was still less than thirty years old!

His figure was only slightly above middle height. What gave it the air of such royal stateliness?

Certainly it was not merely his dress, which consisted wholly of velvet, silk, and satin, with the gold of the Fleece that hung below the lace ruff at his throat. True, the colours of the costume were becoming. Dark violet and golden yellow alternated in the slashed doublet and wide breeches. His father had worn similar apparel when he confessed his love for her.

Should Barbara regard this as a good omen or an evil one?

He was not yet aware of her arrival for, completely absorbed in the subject of their conversation, he was talking with his private secretary Escovedo.

How animated his beautiful features became! how leonine he looked when he indignantly shook his head with its wealth of golden hair!

Oh, yes! Women's hearts must indeed fly to him, and Barbara now understood what she had heard of the beautiful Diana of Sorrento, and the no less beautiful Alaria Mendoza, and their love for him.

Thus she had imagined him. Yet no! His outer man, in its proud patrician beauty and winning charm, even surpassed her loftiest expectation. One thing alone surprised her: the seriousness of his youthful features and the lines upon his lofty brow.

Why did her favourite of fortune bear these traces of former anxieties?

Now the priest interrupted him. Had he told her John of her entrance?

Yet that was scarcely possible, for his face revealed no trace of filial pleasure. On the contrary. He rallied his courage, as if he were about to step into a cold river, straightened himself, and pressed his right hand, clinched into a fist, upon his hip. Perhaps---the saints be praised!---Father Dorante might have reminded him of something else, for he turned to Escovedo again and gave him an order.

Then he waved his hand, flung back his handsome head as King Philip was in the habit of doing, but in a far nobler, freer manner, hastily passed his hand through his wavy hair, as if to strengthen his courage, and then walked slowly, with haughty, almost arrogant dignity, to the door.

On the threshold he paused and looked at her. How bright were the large blue eyes which now gazed at Barbara with an expression far more searching than joyous.

Yet even while, with one hand resting on the back of the chair and the other pressed upon her panting bosom, she was striving to find the right words, Don John's glance brightened.

She was not mistaken. He had dreaded this meeting, and now with joyful surprise was asking himself whether this could be the woman who had been described to him as a showy, extremely whimsical, perverse person, who used her son's renown to obtain access to aristocratic houses and as many pleasures as possible.

She must at any rate have been remarkably beautiful, and how wonderfully her delicately chiselled features had retained a charm which is usually peculiar to youth! how well the now dull gold of her thick tresses harmonized with the faint flush on the almost unwrinkled face! and how dignified was the bearing of her figure, still slender, in spite of her matronly increase in flesh!

No wonder that she had once fired the heart of his distinguished father! Now--that sunny glance could not deceive Barbara--now her appearance had ceased to be unpleasant to him; nay, perhaps even pleased him. And now she could bear it no longer; from the inmost depths of her heart rose the cry: "John, my child! My dear, dear son!"

Again, with the speed of lightning, the question darted through Don John's mind: "Is this the woman whose voice, I was told, offended the ear? Spiteful, base slander!" How fervent, how gentle, how full of tender affection her cry had sounded! Not even from the lips of Doha Magdalena, his much-loved "Tia," had his own name ever echoed so musically as from those of yonder woman, whom he had just shrunk from meeting as though it were an inevitable misfortune.

Shame, regret, love, seethed hotly within him. It was long since he had felt emotion like that which mastered him when her tearful eyes again met his, and now, in the enthusiastic soul of this favourite of fortune, whose lofty flight neither glory, nor fame, nor disappointment could paralyze, in the bosom of this good, high-minded young human being stirred the consciousness that a great new happiness was in store for him, and from his lips rang the cry for which Barbara had waited so long with vain yearning, "Mother!" and again "Mother!"

It seemed to her as if the bright sun had suddenly burst in its full, dazzling radiance from midnight darkness. Three swift steps took her to Don John and, no longer able to control herself, she seized one of the hands which he had extended to her to kiss it; but his chivalrous nature forbade him to permit this, and at the same moment he had obeyed the impulse to kiss the face upturned to his with such loving tenderness.

On the way she had pondered long over the question how she should address him; but now she knew that she need not call him "Your Excellency," far less "Your Highness." To impose so severe a constraint upon her poor, poor heart was no longer required and, though interrupted by low sobbing, she again cried with all the fervour of the most tender maternal love: "My son! My dear, dear child!"

Then suddenly the words she had vainly sought came voluntarily, and in fluent speech she told him how her heart had so long consumed itself with yearning for him, and that she had now left everything behind to obey his summons; and he thanked her with eager warmth by raising the hand which clasped his to his lips.

What he desired of her would be hard for her to do, but now that he knew her it was far harder to ask. Yet it must be done, because upon this might perhaps depend the great hopes which he fixed upon the future, and which would atone for what had so cruelly embittered and poisoned the past.

Barbara gazed more intently into the noble face whose blooming youthful beauty had just delighted her, and in doing so perceived far more distinctly the sorrowful, anxious expression which she had formerly thought she noticed. In pained surprise she inquired what cause he, whom Heaven had hitherto loaded with its most precious gifts, had to complain of Fate, as whose spoiled favourite she, like all the rest of the world, had believed him happy.

He laughed softly, but with such keen bitterness that it pierced her to the heart, and the bright flush with which joy had suffused her cheeks suddenly vanished.

Her favourite of Fortune indignantly rejected the belief that he had reason to look back upon his past life with gratitude and pleasure.

It was incomprehensible and, carried away by the violent agitation which seized upon her, she described with fiery vivacity how the conviction that he had gained everything which her hard sacrifice and her prayers had sought, had beautified her life and helped her to bear even the most painful trials with quiet submission, nay, with joyous gratitude.

Stimulated by the power of the extraordinary things which she had experienced, she described in a ceaseless flow of vivid words how she had torn her child from her soul in order to place it in the path which was to lead to fame, splendour, and honour---in short, to everything that adorns and lends value to life.

"And why, in the name of all the saints," she concluded, "why must I now tell myself that I endured this great suffering in vain, and that what filled my heart with joy was only an idle delusion? Yet I watched your steps as the hunter follows the trail of the game. I saw how every fresh onset led you to greater splendour, higher renown, and more exalted grandeur."

His cheeks, too, had now flushed. What life was still pulsing in the veins of this woman, already past her youth! with what impressive power she understood how to describe what moved her! Yet how mistaken was the view to which maternal love and the desire of her heart had led her artist nature! She had seen only the light, not the shadow, the darkness, the gloom, which had clouded his course of fame.

To secure splendour and grandeur for him, she had yielded to the most cruel demand, and what had been the result of this sacrifice? What had she gained by it?

How had the happiness in which she fancied she saw him revelling been constituted?

The power of the newly awakened experiences bore him away also, and he described no less vividly what he had suffered.

Yes, indeed! He had not lacked great successes, far-reaching renown, high honours, and some degree of glory. But what a tale he---not yet thirty---now related! He, the son of an Emperor, the brother of a powerful King, who was adorned by as many crowns as there were fingers on his hand!

He had been King Philip's servant and useful commander in chief, nothing more.

And now he described the sovereign's cold nature, unfeeling calculation, and offensive suspicion. He, Don John, the not all unworthy son of the great Emperor Charles, was not born to obey all his life, and allow himself to be turned to account, worn out, and abused for the benefit of another. He, too, might lay claim to the right of governing a kingdom of his own as its ruler, benefactor, and Mehrer.

After Lepanto, the crowns of the Morea and Albania had been offered to him. Then, after he had conquered Tunis for his brother Philip, he had wished to reign over that country as its king. Had it been ceded to him, large provinces would have been taken from the infidels. This, it might have been supposed, was sufficient reason for Philip to intrust it to his government. But although the Holy Father in Rome and other rulers had recognised the justice of these wishes, his royal brother could not be persuaded to grant his just demands, and destroyed these hopes with cruel coldness. He had not even been induced to recognise him as Infant, as a lawful member of his family.

With trivial pretexts, and promises which he never intended to fulfil, the hypocritical, selfish, niggardly man had repulsed, delayed, and put him off.

So his life had been spoiled by the most cruel disappointments, by a succession of the bitterest wrongs. Since Lepanto, no pure happiness had bloomed again for him. He was a miserable, disappointed, ill-treated man, who could never regain his former happiness until he obtained, on his own account, what he himself called greatness, honour, glory, and power. The gifts, no, the more than well-earned payments for which he was indebted to the King, were only a bodiless shadow, a caricature of these lofty gifts of Heaven.

His mother, alarmed, cried in terror, "What an ambition!"

But Don John, with increasing excitement, exclaimed: "Yes, mother! I am so ambitious that, if I knew there was another man who more ardently desired renown and honour, I would throw myself out of this window. 'Who does not struggle ward, falls back!' has long been my motto, and I am struggling upward and know the goal."

A startling suspicion seized Barbara, and with anxious caution she whispered:

"Do I see aright? You have learned from Flanders and Brabant how bitterly King Philip is hated there, and you now hope to contend with him for the crown of the Netherlands? The victory you, my hero, my general, you would surely attain---" But here she was interrupted.

Don John cut short her words with the cry, "Mother!" and then went on indignantly: "If any one else had given me this advice, I would deprive him of any inclination to repeat it. God granted Don Philip the sovereignty. My oath, my honour, forbid me to rise against him. He has lost all claim to my love, my gratitude, but he is sure of the fidelity of his ill-treated brother. Besides," he added proudly, "my wishes mount higher."

Barbara had listened to her son with the utmost eagerness; now, taking a locket from the breast of his doublet, he whispered:

"Do you know whom this lovely picture represents? No? Well, these are the features of the fairest and most unfortunate of women. Mary Stuart, the hapless Queen of Scotland, the devout, patient sufferer for our holy faith, looks at you from this frame. She does not refuse me her hand. The Holy Father in Rome and the Guises in France approve the bold enterprise; but I shall take the army under my command by sea to England. I am sure of victory in this conflict. With the most beautiful of women, I shall gain the crown which I need and which will best suit me."

"John!" Barbara exclaimed, carried away by the daring of this proposal, and her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm. "This desire is worthy of you and your great father. If I can aid you in its realization-----"

"You can," Don John eagerly interrupted; "for the first step is to gain the consent of the States-General to despatch the army, which must now be sent back to Spain, thither by sea. When the troops are once on the way they will steer to England, instead of southward. But even to embark these forces I shall need the consent of the representatives of the country. Therefore, difficult as it is for me, the words must be uttered: Your residence in the provinces will prevent my obtaining it. Spare me the mention of my reasons; but the circumstance that you always opened your house to the Spanish party must fill the King's enemies with distrust of you. Besides, it is scarcely credible; but you must believe Escovedo, to whom I owe this information. How petty people in the provinces can be about such matters! An edict was recently issued which commands the removal of every official who can not prove that the union of the parents who gave him life was consecrated by the Holy Church. Alas, mother, that I should be compelled to wound you at our first meeting! But if your love is as great as your every glance tells me, as you have just confessed with such touching warmth-----"

"And as I shall confess," she cried impetuously, "so long as a single breath stirs this bosom; for I love you, John---love you with all the strength of this poor, sorely tortured soul. But, child, child! What you ask of me---It comes so unexpectedly---you have no suspicion how deeply it pierces into the very heart of my life. I must leave the country which has become my home, the city where prejudice and enmity greeted me, and where I have now obtained the position that befits me. A venerable sick man is in my house, longing for the return of the nurse who left him for your sake. My poor---The rest that I must cast aside and abandon is more than I can enumerate now. Nor could I, this request bewilders me so ---Give me a little time to collect my thoughts, for you see---But if you look at me so, John, I can---Yet no!---It certainly is not necessary that I should say yes or no at once. I must first learn whether you---whether the sacrifice I made for your glory and grandeur---it was in Landshut, you know---whether it was really so useless, whether you are in reality as unhappy as you, the fame-crowned, beloved, and lauded child of an Emperor, would have me believe, or whether---Forgive me, John, but before I make this terribly difficult decision I must---yes, I must see clearly. As surely as your hero soul harbours no falsity, it would be unworthy of you to show your mother a distorted image of your inner life; you must confess whether you---"

"Whether," Don John, with a smile of sorrowful bitterness, here interrupted the deeply troubled woman---"whether, in order to soften your heart, I am not painting in blacker colours than reality requires. Oh, how little you know me yet! I would rather this tongue should wither than that I should unchivalrously permit it to deviate one straw's breadth from the truth in order to attain a selfish purpose. No, mother! My description of the grief which often overpowers this soul was far too lukewarm. If your first sacrifice was intended to make me a happy man, its effect was no stronger than the light of the candle which is burned amid the radiance of the noonday sun. Perhaps I should have been happier had I been allowed to grow up in modest circumstances under your tender care; for then my course would have been long and steep, and I should have been forced to climb many steps to reach the point where barriers are fixed to ambition. But as it is, I began at the place which many of the best men regard as the highest goal. The great man whom you loved understood life better than you. Had I obeyed his wish, and in the stillness of the cloister striven for blessings which do not belong to this world, this miserable existence would have seemed less unendurable to me, then doubtless a much wider space would have separated me from despair; for I am so unhappy, mother, that I envy the poor peasant who in the sweat of his brow gathers the harvest which his sterile fields produce; for years I have been as wretched as the captive lion in its cage, the lover whose bride is torn from him on the marriage day. Imagine the wish as a woman, and beside her a magician who, by virtue of the power which he possesses, cries, 'The fulfilment of every desire you strive to attain shall be forever withheld,' and you will have an idea of the devastated existence of the pitiable man who, if it were not sinful, would curse those who gave him the life in which he has long seen nothing save the horrible, jeering spectre of disappointment."

"Stop!" moaned Barbara sorrowfully, pressing her hand upon her brow as if frantic. "So even my hardest sacrifice was futile, and what rendered life valuable to my foolish heart was mere delusion and bewildering deception. What I beheld raising you to the stars, as though with eagles' wings, was a clogging weight; what seemed to me at a distance the bright sunshine irradiating your path, was a Will-o'-the-wisp luring to destruction. What I thought white, was black, the radiant daylight was dusk and the darkness of night. Oh, if it were really granted me Yet, child, you certainly do not know what you are asking. So, before it comes to the final decision, let me put this one more question: Do you believe, really and firmly, that if the confidence of the States-General permits you to take your army by sea, and you lead it in England and succeed in winning the crown and hand of this---whether she is guilty or not---beautiful, devout, and, whatever errors she has committed, desirable Queen, that the troubles which it is so hard for your ambitious soul to bear will then vanish? When you have won the woman for whom you yearn, the throne, and the sceptre, will your sore heart be healed and happiness make its joyous entry, and also remain in your soul, that is so hard to satisfy? For---I see and feel it---it is carried away by the 'More, farther,' of your father. Can you, my John, have you really the firm conviction that, if this lofty desire is fulfilled, you will be content and believe that you have found the summit and the limit of your feverish struggle upward and forward?"

"Yes, and again yes," cried Don John in a tone of immovably firm belief, while his large eyes beamed upon his mother with an expression of full and genuine trust. "The vainglory which your first sacrifice brought me was the source of this life full of bitter disappointment. The hand of Mary Stuart, the lovely martyr, the woman so lavishly endowed with every mental and physical gift, for whom my heart has yearned ever since I saw her picture, and the crown of England, the symbol of genuine majesty, will transform disappointment into the fulfilment which Heaven has hitherto denied me. If these both fall to the lot of the son, the mother's sacrifice will not have been in vain; no, it will bring him golden fruit, for the success of this enterprise will bestow upon your John, besides the fleeting radiance, the sun whence the light emanates. It will raise him to the height to which he aspires, and for which Fate destined him."

Here he hesitated, for the agitated face of Escovedo, who entered with a despatch in his hand, showed that something unexpected and startling had occurred.

The secretary, Don John's friend and counsellor, did not allow himself to be intimidated by the angry gesture with which his master waved him back, but handed him the paper, exclaiming in a tone ringing with the horror the news had inspired: "Antwerp attacked by his Majesty's rebellious troops, those in Alst, headed by their Eletto---burned to ashes, plundered, destroyed!"

With a hasty snatch Don John seized the parchment announcing the misfortune, and read it, panting for breath.

The Council of Antwerp had addressed it to King Philip, and sent a copy to him, the newly appointed governor.

When he let the hand which held the paper fall, he was deadly pale, and gazed around him as though seeking assistance.

Then his eyes met those of his mother who, seized with anxious fears, was watching his every movement, and he handed her the fatal sheet, with the half-sorrowful, half-disdainful exclamation:

"And I am to lead this abused people back to love the man who sent them the Duke of Alba, that he might heal their wounds with his pitiless iron hand, and who let the poor, brave fellows in his service starve and go in rags until, in fierce despair, they seized for themselves what their employer denied."

The sheet Barbara's son had handed to her trembled in her hand as she read half aloud: "It is the greatest commercial city in Europe, the fosterer of art, knowledge, manufactures, and the Catholic faith, which never wavered in obedience to the King, hurled in a single day from the height of honour and happiness to a gulf of misery, and become a den of robbers

and murderers, who know nothing of God and the King. Old men, women, and children have been slaughtered by them without distinction, the goods belonging partly to foreign owners have been stolen and burned, and the magnificent Town Hall, with all its treasures of documents and patents, has become a prey of the flames."

"Horrible! horrible!" cried Barbara, and Don John repeated her words, and added in a hollow tone: "And this happened yesterday, on the selfsame Sunday which saw me ride into the Netherlands! These are the bonfires which redden the heavens on my arrival!"

"William of Orange will call them incendiary flames crying aloud for vengeance," fell in half-stifled accents from Barbara's lips.

"And this time with some reason," replied Don John in a tone of assent, "for the men who kindled them are mercenaries of the King, formerly our own troops, who have been driven to desperation." Then he continued passionately: "And Philip sends me---me, a man of the sword---to these provinces. What is the warrior to do here? This blade is too good to deal the death-blow to the body which is already bleeding from a thousand wounds. If, nevertheless, I did it, I should destroy the most productive fountain of the King's wealth. It is not a man who can fight and command an army and a navy that is needed here, but a woman who understands how to mediate and to heal. The King sent me to this country not to gather fresh laurels, but to be shipwrecked, and with bleeding brow return defeated. Oh, I see through him! But I also know---Heaven be praised!--- what I owe to myself, my father's son. If the States-General permit me to take the troops away by sea, I will gain the woman and the crown that are beckoning to me in another country, and his Majesty may send a more pliant regent of either sex to the provinces to continue the battle with William of Orange, who fights with weapons which my straightforward nature and firm sword ill understand how to meet. This sheet places the decision before me. Real, genuine glory, the fairest of wives, and a proud crown---or defeat and ruin."

The close of this outpouring of the young hero's heart sounded like a manly, irrevocable resolution; but his mother laid her hand upon his arm, and said quietly, "I will go."

A sunny glance of gratitude from her son rested upon her; she, however, only bent her head slightly and went on as calmly as if she had found the strength to be content, but with warm affection:

"My first sacrifice was vain. May the second not only aid you to gain the splendour of a crown, but, above all, instil into your soul the satisfaction with that longed-for highest happiness which your mother's heart desires for you!"

Then Don John obeyed the mighty impulse of his soul to pour forth to his mother the gratitude and love which her unselfish retirement wrung from him. His arms clasped her closely and tenderly, and never had he rewarded even his foster-mother in Villagarcia for her love and faithfulness with a more affectionate kiss.

"My gratitude will die only with myself," he cried as he released her. "Blessed be the day on which I found my own mother! It led you, dear lady, not only to your John, but to his love."

Escovedo, moved to the depths of his heart, had listened in surprise to this outburst of feeling from the famous son of the Emperor, whom he loved, to whom he had devoted his fine intellect and wealth of experience, and for whom it was appointed that he should die.

Thus ended Don John's meeting with his mother, which he had dreaded as an inevitable evil. Alba, who described her as an extremely obstinate woman, had advised him to use a stratagem to induce her to yield to his wish and leave the Netherlands. He was to represent that his sister, the Duchess Margaret, who was holding her court at Aquila, in the Abruzzi Mountains, invited her to visit her in order to make her acquaintance. She would not resist this summons, for

she had often made her way to the government building, and took special pleasure in the society of the aristocratic Spaniards. When she was once on board a ship, she would be obliged to submit to being carried to Spain, whence her return could easily be prevented.

To set such a snare for this woman had been impossible for Don John. Truth and love had sufficed to induce her to fulfil his wish.

Senor Escovedo had witnessed much that was noble during this hour, but especially a mother whom in the future he could remember with gratitude and joy; for Don John's confidant knew that of all he saw and heard here not a word was false and feigned, yet he knew better than any other man his master's heart and every look. Barbara, too, believed her son no less confidently, and as the shout of victory reaches combatants lying on the ground, wounded by lances and arrows, the cry of a secret voice within her soul, sorely as she was stricken, great as was the sacrifice and suffering which she had imposed upon herself, called upon her to rejoice in the highest of all gifts---the love of her child, to whom hitherto she had been only a dreaded stranger.

She could not yet obtain a clear insight into the result of the promise which she had given her son; it seemed as though a veil was drawn over her active mind.

Yet again and again she asked herself what power could have induced her to grant so quickly and unconditionally to the son a demand which in her youth she would have refused, with defiant opposition, even to his ardently loved father. But she took as little trouble to find the answer as she felt regret for her compliance.

The world to which she returned after this hour had gained a new aspect. She had not understood the real nature of the former one. The exclamation which her son's confession had elicited she still believed after long reflection. What she had deemed great, was small; what had seemed to her light and brilliant, was dark. What she had considered worthy of the greatest sacrifice was petty and trivial; no fountain of joy, but a fierce torrent of new wishes constantly surpassing one another. With their boundless extent they had of necessity remained unfulfilled. Thus woe on woe, and at the same time the painfully paralyzing feeling of the hostility of Fate had been evoked from its surges and, instead of happiness, they had brought sorrow and suffering.

Pride in such a son had been the delight of her life; henceforth, she felt it, she must seek her happiness, her joys, elsewhere, and she knew also where, and realized that she was receiving higher for smaller things. Instead of sharing his renown, she had gained the right to share his misfortune and his griefs.

The more and the more eagerly she pondered in silence, the more surely she perceived that earthly glory and magnificence, which she had thought the greatest blessings, were only a series of sunbeams, swiftly following one another, which would be clouded by one shadow after the other until darkness and oblivion engulfed them.

Like every outward splendour, fame dazzles the eyes of men. It would dim her son's---she knew it now---whether he looked backward to the past or forward to the future. The greatness he had gained he overlooked; what awaited him in the future, having lost his clearness of vision and impartiality, he was disposed to overvalue.

From her eyes, on the contrary, this knowledge removed veil after veil.

It was a vain delusion which led him to the belief that the Scottish and English crowns possessed the power to render him happy, and end his struggle for new and higher honours; for royalty also belonged to the glory whose worthlessness she now perceived as plainly as the reflection of her own face in the surface of the mirror.

Barbara saw her son for only a few more fleeting hours; the "Spanish fury" which destroyed the flower of Antwerp doubled his business cares, forbade any delay, and imperiously claimed his whole time and strength.

The mother watched his honest labours sorrowfully. She knew that the chivalrous champion of the faith, the sincere enthusiast, to whom nothing was higher than honour and the stainless purity of his name, must succumb to his most eminent foe, the Prince of Orange, with his tireless, inventive, thoroughly statesmanlike intellect, which preserved the power of seeing in the darkness, and did not shrink from deceit where it would promote the great cause which she did not understand, but to which he consecrated every drop of his heart's blood, every penny of his property.

Her son came to the country as a Spaniard and the brother of the hated Philip on the day of the most abominable crime history ever narrated, and which his followers committed; and who stood higher in the hearts of the people of the Netherlands than their beloved helper in need, their "Father William"?

She saw her son go to this hopeless conflict like a garlanded victim to the altar. She had nothing to aid him save her prayers and the execution of the heavy sacrifice which she had resolved to make. The collapse of her belief, wishes, and expectations produced a transformation of her whole nature. A world of ideas had crumbled into fragments before and within her, and from their ruins a new one suddenly sprang up in her strong soul. Where yesterday her warlike temper had defied or resisted, to-day she retired with lowered weapons. To contend against her son, and force her new knowledge upon him, would have seemed to her foolish and fruitless, for she desired and expected nothing more from him than that he should keep for her the love she had won.

So she yielded to his desire without resistance. However his destiny might turn, he should be obliged to admit that his mother had omitted nothing in her power to open to him the path which, according to his own opinion, might lead to the height for which he longed.

She made use of his affectionate readiness to serve her only so far as to beg him to take charge of her son Conrad. He did so willingly, and endeavoured to induce the young man to enter the priesthood. He wished to spare him the disappointments which had marred his own life, but Conrad preferred the army.

His mother did not forget him, and did everything in her power for him. He remained on terms of affectionate union with her, but he did not see her again until the gold of her hair was changed to silver, and he himself had risen to the rank of colonel.

This was to happen in Spain. Barbara had gone there by way of Genoa under the escort of Count Faconvergue, commander of the German mercenaries, and while doing so had been treated with the respect and distinguished consideration which was her due as the mother of Don John of Austria, who had now acknowledged her.

Like every other wish of her son, Barbara had fulfilled with quiet indulgence his desire that she would not again enter the Netherlands and Ghent.

From Luxemburg she directed what should be done with her house, her servants, and the recipients of her alms. Hannibal Melas relieved her of the care of Maestro Feys, which she had undertaken, and under his faithful nursing the old musician was granted many more years of life. The Maltese also distributed among her poor the large sums which the sale of Barbara's property produced.

In Spain she was received with the utmost consideration by the Marquis de la Mota, Dona Magdalena de Ulloa's brother, and later by the lady herself. But at first there was no real bond of affection between these women, and this was Barbara's fault, for Dona Magdalena's experience was the same as Don John's. She perceived with shame how greatly

she had undervalued Don John's mother---nay, how much she had wronged her---but her sedulous efforts to make amends for the error produced an effect upon Barbara different from her expectations; for the great lady's manner seemed like a confession of guilt, and kept alive the memory of the anguish of soul which Dona Magdalena had so often inflicted upon her.

The early death of the young hero whom both loved so tenderly first drew them together. Barbara had witnessed with very different feelings from Dona Magdalena and her brother how the former regarded every false step of Don John, and especially that of his expedition to England, as a heavy misfortune, and as such bewailed it. Dona Magdalena had been firmly convinced that the spell of fame which surrounded the victor of Lepanto, and the irresistible loveliness characteristic of his whole nature, would finally win the hearts of the Netherlanders, and even induce the Prince of Orange, whose friendship Don John himself hoped to gain, to join hands with him in the attempt to work for the welfare of his country.

Barbara knew that this expectation deceived him.

Toleration and liberty were the blessings which the Prince of Orange desired to win for his people, and both were hateful to her son, reared at the Spanish court, as she herself saw in them an encroachment upon the just demands of the Church and the claims of royalty. Fire and water could harmonize more easily than these two men, and Barbara foresaw which of them in this conflict would be the extinguishing flood.

She perceived how waterfall after waterfall was quenching the flames which burned in Don John's honest soul for the supposed welfare of the nation intrusted to him. He was reaping hatred, scorn, and humiliation wherever he had hoped to win love and gratitude in the Netherlands. His royal brother left him in the lurch where he was entitled to depend upon his assistance. But when Philip let the mask fall and showed openly how deeply he distrusted the glorious son of his dead father, and to what a degree his ill will had risen---when he committed the cruel crime of having Escovedo, the devoted, loyal friend and counsellor of the victor of Lepanto, assassinated in Madrid, where he had come to labour in his master's cause---the most ambitious and sensitive of hearts received the deathblow which was to put an end to his famous career and his young life.

Scarcely two years after Barbara's meeting with Don John, the Emperor Charles's hero son died. Even in the Netherlands he had remained to the last victor on the battlefield. Alessandro Farnese, his dearest friend, his companion in youth, in study, and in war, had valiantly supported him with his good sword; but his faithful friendship had been unable to heal the sufferings which wore out Don John's strong body and brave soul when, to the severest political failures, was added the bloody treachery of his royal brother.

The death of this son doubtless first taught Barbara with what cruel anguish a mother's heart can be visited; but her John had not really died to her. Accustomed to love him from a distance, she continued to live in and with him, and in her thoughts and dreams he remained her own.

At first, without leaving the lay condition, she had joined the Dominican Sisters in the Convent of Santa Maria la Real at Cebrian; but even the slight constraint which life behind stone walls imposed upon her still seemed unendurable, so she retired to the little city of Colindres, in the district of Loredo. There stood the deserted house of Escovedo, the murdered friend and counsellor of her John and, as everything under its roof reminded her of the beloved dead, it seemed the most fitting spot in which to pass the remnant of her days. In it she led an independent but quiet, secluded life. She spent only a few maravedis for her own wants, while she used the thousands of ducats which, after her son's death, King Philip awarded her as an annual income, to make life easier for the poor and the sick whom she affectionately sought out.

With every tear she dried she believed that she was showing the best honour to her son's memory.

She was denied the pleasure of placing a flower upon his grave, for King Philip had done his dead brother the honour which he withheld from him during life and, though only as a corpse, received him among the members of his illustrious race. His coffin had been entombed in the cold family vault of the Escorial, where no sunbeam enters.

But Barbara needed no place associated with his person in order to remember him; she always felt near him, and memories were the vital air which nourished her soul. Music remained the best ornament of her solitary existence, and never did the forms of the son and the father come nearer to her than when she sang the songs--or in after years played them on the harp and lute--to which her imperial lover had liked to listen.

The memory of her John's father now taught her to change the "More, farther," of his motto into the maxim, "Learn to be content," the memory of the son, that every sacrifice which we make for the happiness of another is futile if, besides splendour and glory, fame and honour, it does not also gain the spiritual blessings whose possession first lends those gifts genuine value. These much-envied favours of Fortune had little to do with the indestructible monument which she erected in her heart to her son and her lover. What built it and lent it eternal endurance were the modest gifts of the heart.

She now knew the names of the blessings which might have guided her boy to a loftier happiness and, full of the love which even death could not assail and lessen, mourned by many, Barbara Blomberg, at an advanced age, closed her eyes upon the world.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

The greatness he had gained he overlooked
Who does not struggle ward, falls back

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