Egmont

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Egmont

by Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

October, 1999 [Etext #1945]

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EGMONT

A TRAGEDY IN FIVE ACTS

BY JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

Translated by Anna Swanwick

Introductory Note

In 1775, when Goethe was twenty-six, and before he went to Weimar, he began to write “Egmont” After working on it at intervals for twelve years, he finished it at Rome in 1787.

The scene of the drama is laid in the Low Countries at the beginning of the revolt against Spain. In the fifteenth century Philip of Burgundy had usurped dominion over several of the provinces of the Netherlands, and through him they had passed into the power of his descendant, the Emperor Charles V. This powerful ruler abolished the constitutional rights of the provinces, and introduced the Inquisition in order to stamp out Protestantism. Prominent among his officers was the Fleming, Lamoral, Count Egmont, upon whom he lavished honors and opportunities of service—opportunities so well improved that, by his victories over the French at Saint-Quentin (1557) and Gravelines (1558) Egmont made a reputation as one of the most brilliant generals in Europe, and became the idol of his countrymen. When in 1559 a new Regent of the Netherlands was to be created, the people hoped that Philip II, who had succeeded Charles, would choose Egmont; but instead he appointed his half-sister Margaret, Duchess of Parma. Under the new Regent the persecution of the Protestants was rigorously pressed, and in 1565 Egmont, though a Catholic, was sent to Madrid to plead for clemency. He was received by the King with every appearance of cordiality, but shortly after his return home the Duke of Alva was sent to the Netherlands with instructions to put down with an iron hand all resistance to his master’s will. How terribly he carried out his orders has been told by Prescott and Motley. Egmont was an early victim, but his martyrdom, with that of Count Horn, and later the assassination of William of Orange, roused the Netherlands to a resistance that ended only with the complete throwing off of the Spanish yoke.

Such in outline is the background chosen by Goethe for his tragedy. With many changes in detail, the dramatist has still preserved a picture of a historical situation of absorbing interest, and has painted a group of admirable portraits.

The drama has long been a favorite on the stage, where it enjoys the advantage of Beethoven’s musical setting.

EGMONT

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Margaret of Parma, (Daughter of Charles V., and Regent of the Netherlands) Count Egmont, (Prince of Gaure) The Duke of Alva William of Orange Ferdinand, (his natural Son) Machiavel, in the service of the Regent Richard, (Egmont’s Private Secretary)

Silva, Gomez, (in the service of Alva) Clara, (the Beloved of Egmont) Her Mother Brackenburg, (a Citizen’s Son), and Vansen, (a Clerk) Soest, (a Shopkeeper), Jetter, (a Tailor), A Carpenter, A Soapboiler (Citizens of Brussels) Buyck, (a Hollander), a Soldier under Egmont Ruysum, (a Frieslander), an invalid Soldier, and deaf People, Attendants, Guards, &c.

The Scene is laid in Brussels.

ACT I

Scene I.—Soldiers and Citizens (with cross-bows)

Jetter (steps forward, and bends his cross-bow). Soest, Buyck, Ruysum

Soest. Come, shoot away, and have done with it! You won’t beat me! Three black rings, you never made such a shot in all your life. And so I’m master for this year.

Jetter. Master and king to boot; who envies you? You’ll have to pay double reckoning; ‘tis only fair you should pay for your dexterity.

Buyck. Jetter, I’ll buy your shot, share the prize, and treat the company. I have already been here so long, and am a debtor for so many civilities. If I miss, then it shall be as if you had shot.

Soest. I ought to have a voice, for in fact I am the loser. No matter! Come, Buyck, shoot away.

Buyck (shoots). Now, corporal, look out!—One! Two! Three! Four!

Soest. Four rings! So be it!

All. Hurrah! Long live the King! Hurrah! Hurrah!

Buyck. Thanks, sirs, master even were too much! Thanks for the honour.

Jetter. You have no one to thank but yourself. Ruysum. Let me tell you—

Soest. How now, grey-beard?

Ruysum. Let me tell you!—He shoots like his master, he shoots like Egmont.

Buyck. Compared with him I am only a bungler. He aims with the rifle as no one else does. Not only when he’s lucky or in the vein; no! he levels, and the bull’s-eye is pierced. I have learned from him. He were indeed a blockhead, who could serve under him and learn nothing!—But, sirs, let us not forget! A king maintains his followers; and so, wine here, at the king’s charge!

Jetter. We have agreed among ourselves that each—

Buyck. I am a foreigner, and a king, and care not a jot for your laws and customs.

Jetter. Why, you are worse than the Spaniard, who has not yet ventured to meddle with them.

Ruysum. What does he say?

Soest (loud to Ruysum). He wants to treat us; he will not hear of our clubbing together, the king paying only a double share.

Ruysum. Let him! under protest, however! ‘Tis his master’s fashion, too, to be munificent, and to let the money flow in a good cause. (Wine is brought.)

All. Here’s to his Majesty! Hurrah!

Jetter (to Buyck). That means your Majesty, of course, Buyck. My hearty thanks, if it be so.

Soest. Assuredly! A Netherlander does not find it easy to drink the health of his Spanish majesty from his heart.

Ruysum. Who?

Soest (aloud). Philip the Second, King of Spain.

Ruysum. Our most gracious king and master! Long life to him.

Soest. Did you not like his father, Charles the Fifth, better?

Ruysum. God bless him! He was a king indeed! His hand reached over the whole earth, and he was all in all. Yet, when he met you, he’d greet you just as one neighbour greets another,—and if you were frightened, he knew so well how to put you at your ease—ay, you understand me—he walked out, rode out, just as it came into his head, with very few followers. We all wept when he resigned the government here to his son. You understand me—he is another sort of man, he’s more majestic.

Jetter. When he was here, he never appeared in public, except in pomp and royal state. He speaks little, they say.

Soest. He is no king for us Netherlanders. Our princes must be joyous and free like ourselves, must live and let live. We will neither be despised nor oppressed, good-natured fools though we be.

Jetter. The king, methinks, were a gracious sovereign enough, if he had only better counsellors.

Soest. No, no! He has no affection for us Netherlanders; he has no heart for the people; he loves us not; how then can we love him? Why is everybody so fond of Count Egmont? Why are we all so devoted to him? Why, because one can read in his face that he loves us; because joyousness, open-heartedness, and good-nature, speak in his eyes; because he possesses nothing that he does not share with him who needs it, ay, and with him who needs it not. Long live Count Egmont! Buyck, it is for you to give the first toast; give us your master's health.

Buyck. With all my heart; here's to Count Egmont! Hurrah!

Ruysum Conqueror of St. Quintin.

Buyck. The hero of Gravelines.

All. Hurrah!

Ruysum. St. Quintin was my last battle. I was hardly able to crawl along, and could with difficulty carry my heavy rifle. I managed, notwithstanding, to singe the skin of the French once more, and, as a parting gift, received a grazing shot in my right leg.

Buyck. Gravelines! Ha, my friends, we had sharp work of it there! The victory was all our own. Did not those French dogs carry fire and desolation into the very heart of Flanders? We gave it them, however! The old hard-listed veterans held out bravely for a while, but we pushed on, fired away, and laid about us, till they made wry faces, and their lines gave way. Then Egmont's horse was shot under him; and for a long time we fought pell-mell, man to man, horse to horse, troop to troop, on the broad, flat, sea-sand. Suddenly, as if from heaven, down came the cannon shot from the mouth of the river, bang, bang, right into the midst of the French. These were English, who, under Admiral Malin, happened

to be sailing past from Dunkirk. They did not help us much, ‘tis true; they could only approach with their smallest vessels, and that not near enough; —besides, their shot fell sometimes among our troops. It did some good, however! It broke the French lines, and raised our courage. Away it went. Helter-skelter! topsy-turvy! all struck dead, or forced into the water; the fellows were drowned the moment they tasted the water, while we Hollanders dashed in after them. Being amphibious, we were as much in our element as frogs, and hacked away at the enemy, and shot them down as if they had been ducks. The few who struggled through, were struck dead in their flight by the peasant women, armed with hoes and pitchforks. His Gallic majesty was compelled at once to hold out his paw and make peace. And that peace you owe to us, to the great Egmont.

All. Hurrah, for the great Egmont! Hurrah! Hurrah!

Jetter. Had they but appointed him Regent, instead of Margaret of Parma!

Soest. Not so! Truth is truth! I’ll not hear Margaret abused. Now it is my turn. Long live our gracious lady!

All. Long life to her!

Soest. Truly, there are excellent women in that family. Long live the Regent!

Jetter. Prudent is she, and moderate in all she does; if she would only not hold so fast and stiffly with the priests. It is partly her fault, too, that we have the fourteen new mitres in the land. Of what use are they, I should like to know? Why, that foreigners may be shoved into the good benefices, where formerly abbots were chosen out of the chapters! And we’re to believe it’s for the sake of religion. We know better. Three bishops were enough for us; things went on decently and reputably. Now each must busy himself as if he were needed; and this gives rise every moment to dissensions and ill-will. And the more you agitate the matter, so much the worse it grows. (They drink.)

Soest. But it was the will of the king; she cannot alter it, one way or another.

Jetter. Then we may not even sing the new psalms; but ribald songs, as many as we please. And why? There is heresy in them, they say, and heaven knows what. I have sung some of them, however; they are new, to be sure, but I see no harm in them.

Buyck. Ask their leave, forsooth! In our province, we sing just what we please. That's because Count Egmont is our stadtholder, who does not trouble himself about such matters. In Ghent, Ypres, and throughout the whole of Flanders, anybody sings them that chooses. (Aloud to Ruysum.) There is nothing more harmless than a spiritual song—Is there, father?

Ruysum. What, indeed! It is a godly work, and truly edifying.

Jetter. They say, however, that they are not of the right sort, not of their sort, and, since it is dangerous, we had better leave them alone. The officers of the Inquisition are always lurking and spying about; many an honest fellow has already fallen into their clutches. They had not gone so far as to meddle with conscience! If they will not allow me to do what I like, they might at least let me think and sing as I please.

Soest. The Inquisition won't do here. We are not made like the Spaniards, to let our consciences be tyrannized over. The nobles must look to it, and clip its wings betimes.

Jetter. It is a great bore. Whenever it comes into their worships' heads to break into my house, and I am sitting there at my work, humming a French psalm, thinking nothing about it, neither good nor bad—singing it just because it is in my throat;—forthwith I'm a heretic, and am clapped into prison. Or if I am passing through the country, and stand near a crowd listening to a new preacher, one of those who have come from Germany; instantly I'm called a rebel, and am in danger of losing my head! Have you ever heard one of these preachers?

Soest. Brave fellows! Not long ago, I heard one of them preach in a field, before thousands and thousands of people. A different sort of dish he gave us from that of our humdrum preachers, who, from the pulpit, choke their hearers with scraps of Latin. He spoke from his heart; told us how we had till now been led by the nose, how we had been kept in darkness, and how we might procure more light;—ay, and he proved it all out of the Bible.

Jetter. There may be something in it. I always said as much, and have often pondered over the matter. It has long been running in my head.

Buyck. All the people run after them.

Soest. No wonder, since they hear both what is good and what is new.

Jetter. And what is it all about? Surely they might 1et every one preach after his own fashion.

Buyck. Come, sirs! While you are talking, you; forget the wine and the Prince of Orange.

Jetter. We must not forget him. He’s a very wall of defence. In thinking of him, one fancies, that if one could only hide behind him, the devil himself could not get at one. Here’s to William of Orange! Hurrah!

All. Hurrah! Hurrah!

Soest. Now, grey-heard, let’s have your toast.

Ruysum. Here’s to old soldiers! To all soldiers! War for ever!

Buyck. Bravo, old fellow. Here’s to all soldiers. War for ever!

Jetter. War! War! Do ye know what ye are shouting about? That it should slip glibly from your tongue is natural enough; but what wretched work it is for us, I have not words to tell you. To be stunned the whole year round by the beating of the drum; to hear of nothing except how one troop marched here, and another there; how they came over this height, and halted near that mill; how many were left dead on this field, and how many on that; how they press forward, and how one wins, and another loses, without being able to comprehend what they are fighting about; how a town is taken, how the citizens are put to the sword, and how it fares with the poor women and innocent children. This is a grief and a trouble, and then one thinks every moment, “Here they come! It will be our turn next.”

Soest. Therefore every citizen must be practised in the use of arms.

Jetter. Fine talking, indeed, for him who has a wife and children. And yet I would rather hear of soldiers than see them.

Buyck. I might take offence at that.

Jetter. It was not intended for you, countryman. When we got rid of the Spanish garrison, we breathed freely again.

Soest. Faith! They pressed on you heavily enough.

Jetter. Mind your own business.

Soest. They came to sharp quarters with you.

Jetter. Hold your tongue.

Soest. They drove him out of kitchen, cellar, chamber—and bed. (They laugh.)

Jetter. You are a blockhead.

Buyck. Peace, sirs! Must the soldier cry peace? Since you will not hear anything about us, let us have a toast of your own—a citizen's toast.

Jetter. We're all ready for that! Safety and peace!

Soest. Order and freedom!

Buyck. Bravo! That will content us all.

(They ring their glasses together, and joyously repeat the words, but in such a manner that each utters a different sound, and it becomes a kind of chant. The old man listens, and at length joins in.)

All. Safety and peace! Order and freedom!

Scene II.–Palace of the Regent

Margaret of Parma (in a hunting dress). Courtiers, Pages, Servants

Regent. Put off the hunt, I shall not ride to-day. Bid Machiavel attend me.

[Exeunt all but the Regent.

The thought of these terrible events leaves me no repose! Nothing can amuse, nothing divert my mind. These images, these cares are always before me. The king will now say that these are the natural fruits of my kindness, of my clemency; yet my conscience assures me that I have adopted the wisest, the most

prudent course. Ought I sooner to have kindled, and spread abroad these flames with the breath of wrath? My hope was to keep them in, to let them smoulder in their own ashes. Yes, my inward conviction, and my knowledge of the circumstances, justify my conduct in my own eyes; but in what light will it appear to my brother! For, can it be denied that the insolence of these foreign teachers waxes daily more audacious? They have desecrated our sanctuaries, unsettled the dull minds of the people, and conjured up amongst them a spirit of delusion. Impure spirits have mingled among the insurgents, horrible deeds have been perpetrated, which to think of makes one shudder, and of these a circumstantial account must be transmitted instantly to court. Prompt and minute must be my communication, lest rumour outrun my messenger, and the king suspect that some particulars have been purposely withheld. I can see no means, severe or mild, by which to stem the evil. Oh, what are we great ones on the waves of humanity? We think to control them, and are ourselves driven to and fro, hither and thither.

[Enter Machiavel.

Regent. Are the despatches to the king prepared?

Machiavel. In an hour they will be ready for your signature.

Regent. Have you made the report sufficiently circumstantial?

Machiavel. Full and circumstantial, as the king loves to have it. I relate how the rage of the iconoclasts first broke out at St. Omer. How a furious multitude, with staves, hatchets, hammers, ladders, and cords, accompanied by a few armed men, first assailed the chapels, churches, and convents, drove out the worshippers, forced the barred gates, threw everything into confusion, tore down the altars, destroyed the statues of the saints, defaced the pictures, and dashed to atoms, and trampled under foot, whatever came in their way that was consecrated and holy. How the crowd increased as it advanced, and how the inhabitants of Ypres opened their gates at its approach. How, with incredible rapidity, they demolished the cathedral, and burned the library of the bishop. How a vast multitude, possessed by the like frenzy, dispersed themselves through Menin, Comines, Verviers, Lille, nowhere encountered opposition; and how, through almost the whole of Flanders, in a single moment, the monstrous conspiracy declared itself, and was accomplished.

Regent. Alas! Your recital rends my heart anew; and the fear that the evil will wax greater and greater, adds to my grief. Tell me your thoughts, Machiavel!

Machiavel. Pardon me, your Highness, my thoughts will appear to you but as idle fancies; and though you always seem well satisfied with my services, you have seldom felt inclined to follow my advice. How often have you said in jest: “You see too far, Machiavel! You should be an historian; he who acts, must provide for the exigence of the hour.” And yet have I not predicted this terrible history? Have I not foreseen it all?

Regent. I too foresee many things, without being able to avert them.

Machiavel. In one word, then:–you will not be able to suppress the new faith. Let it be recognized, separate its votaries from the true believers, give them churches of their own, include them within the pale of social order, subject them to the restraints of law,—do this, and you will at once tranquillize the insurgents. All other measures will prove abortive, and you will depopulate the country.

Regent. Have you forgotten with what aversion the mere suggestion of toleration was rejected by my brother? Know you not, how in every letter he urgently recommends to me the maintenance of the true faith? That he will not hear of tranquility and order being restored at the expense of religion? Even in the provinces, does he not maintain spies, unknown to us, in order to ascertain who inclines to the new doctrines? Has he not, to our astonishment, named to us this or that individual residing in our very neighbourhood, who, without its being known, was obnoxious to the charge of heresy? Does he not enjoin harshness and severity? and am I to be lenient? Am I to recommend for his adoption measures of indulgence and toleration? Should I not thus lose all credit with him, and at once forfeit his confidence?

Machiavel. I know it. The king commands and puts you in full possession of his intentions. You are to restore tranquillity and peace by measures which cannot fail still more to embitter men’s minds, and which must inevitably kindle the flames of war from one extremity of the country to the other. Consider well what you are doing. The principal merchants are infected—nobles, citizens, soldiers. What avails persisting in our opinion, when everything is changing around us? Oh, that some good genius would suggest to Philip that it better becomes a monarch to govern burghers of two different creeds, than to excite them to mutual destruction.

Regent. Never let me hear such words again. Full well I know that the policy of statesmen rarely maintains truth and fidelity; that it excludes from the heart candour, charity, toleration. In secular affairs, this is, alas! only too true; but shall we trifle with God as we do with each other? Shall we be indifferent to our established faith, for the sake of which so many have sacrificed their lives? Shall we abandon it to these far-fetched, uncertain, and self-contradicting heresies?

Machiavel. Think not the worse of me for what I have uttered.

Regent. I know you and your fidelity. I know too that a man may be both honest and sagacious, and yet miss the best and nearest way to the salvation of his soul. There are others, Machiavel, men whom I esteem, yet whom I needs must blame.

Machiavel. To whom do you refer?

Regent. I must confess that Egmont caused me to-day deep and heart-felt annoyance.

Machiavel. How so?

Regent. By his accustomed demeanour, his usual indifference and levity. I received the fatal tidings as I was leaving church, attended by him and several others. I did not restrain my anguish, I broke forth into lamentations, loud and deep, and turning to him, exclaimed, “See what is going on in your province! Do you suffer it, Count, you, in whom the king confided so implicitly?”

Machiavel. And what was his reply?

Regent. As if it were a mere trifle, an affair of no moment, he answered: “Were the Netherlanders but satisfied as to their constitution! The rest would soon follow.”

Machiavel. There was, perhaps, more truth than discretion or piety in his words. How can we hope to acquire and to maintain the confidence of the Netherlander, when he sees that we are more interested in appropriating his possessions, than in promoting his welfare, temporal or spiritual? Does the number of souls saved by the new bishops exceed that of the fat benefices they have swallowed? And are they not for the most part foreigners? As yet, the office of stadtholder has been held by Netherlanders; but do not the Spaniards betray their great and

irresistible desire to possess themselves of these places? Will not people prefer being governed by their own countrymen, and according to their ancient customs, rather than by foreigners, who, from their first entrance into the land, endeavour to enrich themselves at the general expense, who measure everything by a foreign standard, and who exercise their authority without cordiality or sympathy?

Regent. You take part with our opponents?

Machiavel. Assuredly not in my heart. Would that with my understanding I could be wholly on our side!

Regent. If such your disposition, it were better I should resign the regency to them; for both Egmont and Orange entertained great hopes of occupying this position. Then they were adversaries, now they are leagued against me, and have become friends—inseparable friends.

Machiavel. A dangerous pair.

Regent. To speak candidly, I fear Orange.—I fear for Egmont.—Orange meditates some dangerous scheme, his thoughts are far-reaching, he is reserved, appears to accede to everything, never contradicts, and while maintaining the show of reverence, with clear foresight accomplishes his own designs.

Machiavel. Egmont, on the contrary, advances with a bold step, as if the world were all his own.

Regent. He bears his head as proudly as if the hand of majesty were not suspended over him.

Machiavel. The eyes of all the people are fixed upon him, and he is the idol of their hearts.

Regent. He has never assumed the least disguise, and carries himself as if no one had a right to call him to account. He still bears the name of Egmont. Count Egmont is the title by which he loves to hear himself addressed, as though he would fain be reminded that his ancestors were masters of Guelderland. Why does he not assume his proper title,—Prince of Gaure? What object has he in view? Would he again revive extinguished claims?

Machiavel. I hold him for a faithful servant of the king.

Regent. Were he so inclined, what important service could he not render to the government? Whereas, now, without benefiting himself, he has caused us unspeakable vexation. His banquets and entertainment have done more to unite the nobles and to knit them together than the most dangerous secret associations. With his toasts, his guests have drunk in a permanent intoxication, a giddy frenzy, that never subsides. How often have his facetious jests stirred up the minds of the populace? and what an excitement was produced among the mob by the new liveries, and the extravagant devices of his followers!

Machiavel. I am convinced he had no design.

Regent. Be that as it may, it is bad enough. As I said before, he injures us without benefiting himself. He treats as a jest matters of serious import; and, not to appear negligent and remiss, we are forced to treat seriously what he intended as a jest. Thus one urges on the other; and what we are endeavouring to avert is actually brought to pass. He is more dangerous than the acknowledged head of a conspiracy; and I am much mistaken if it is not all remembered against him at court. I cannot deny that scarcely a day passes in which he does not wound me—deeply wound me.

Machiavel. He appears to me to act on all occasions, according to the dictates of his conscience. Regent. His conscience has a convenient mirror. His demeanour is often offensive. He carries himself as if he felt he were the master here, and were withheld by courtesy alone from making us feel his supremacy; as if he would not exactly drive us out of the country; there’ll be no need for that.

Machiavel. I entreat you, put not too harsh a construction upon his frank and joyous temper, which treats lightly matters of serious moment. You but injure yourself and him.

Regent. I interpret nothing. I speak only of inevitable consequences, and I know him. His patent of nobility and the Golden Fleece upon his breast strengthen his confidence, his audacity. Both can protect him against any sudden outbreak of royal displeasure. Consider the matter closely, and he is alone responsible for the whole mischief that has broken out in Flanders. From the first, he connived at the proceedings of the foreign teachers, avoided stringent measures, and perhaps rejoiced in secret that they gave us so much to do. Let me alone; on this

occasion, I will give utterance to that which weighs upon my heart; I will not shoot my arrow in vain. I know where he is vulnerable. For he is vulnerable.

Machiavel. Have you summoned the council? Will Orange attend?

Regent. I have sent for him to Antwerp. I will lay upon their shoulders the burden of responsibility; they shall either strenuously co-operate with me in quelling the evil, or at once declare themselves rebels. Let the letters be completed without delay, and bring them for my signature. Then hasten to despatch the trusty Vasca to Madrid, he is faithful and indefatigable; let him use all diligence, that he may not be anticipated by common report, that my brother, may receive the intelligence first through him. I will myself speak with him ere he departs.

Machiavel. Your orders shall be promptly and punctually obeyed.

Scene III.—Citizen's House

Clara, her Mother, Brackenburg

Clara. Will you not hold the yarn for me, Brackenburg?

Brackenburg. I entreat you, excuse me, Clara.

Clara. What ails you? Why refuse me this trifling service?

Brackenburg. When I hold the yarn, I stand as it were spell-bound before you, and cannot escape your eyes.

Clara. Nonsense! Come and hold!

Mother (knitting in her arm-chair). Give us a song! Brackenburg sings so good a second. You used to be merry once, and I had always something to laugh at.

Brackenburg. Once! Clara. Well, let us sing.

Brackenburg. As you please.

Clara. Merrily, then, and sing away! 'Tis a soldier's song, my favourite.

(She winds yarn, and sings with Brackenburg.)

The drum is resounding, And shrill the fife plays; My love, for the battle, His brave troop arrays; He lifts his lance high, And the people he sways. My blood it is boiling! My heart throbs pit-pat! Oh, had I a jacket, With hose and with hat! How boldly I'd follow, And march through the gate; Through all the wide province I'd follow him straight. The foe yield, we capture Or shoot them! Ah, me! What heart-thrilling rapture A soldier to be!

(During the song, Brackenburg has frequently looked at Clara; at length his voice falters, his eyes fill with tears, he lets the skein fall, and goes to the window. Clara finishes the song alone, her Mother motions to her, half displeased, she rises, advances a few steps towards him, turns back, as if irresolute, and again sits down.)

Mother. What is going on in the street, Brackenburg? I hear soldiers marching.

Brackenburg. It is the Regent's body-guard.

Clara. At this hour? What can it mean? (She rises and joins Brackenburg at the window.) That is not the daily guard; it is more numerous! almost all the troops! Oh, Brackenburg, go! Learn what it means. It must be something unusual. Go, good Brackenburg, do me this favour.

Brackenburg. I am going! I will return immediately. (He offers his hand to Clara, and she gives him hers.)

[Exit Brackenburg.

Mother. Thou sendest him away so soon!

Clara. I am curious; and, besides—do not be angry, Mother—his presence pains me. I never know how I ought to behave towards him. I have done him a wrong, and it goes to my very heart to see how deeply he feels it. Well, it can't be helped now!

Mother. He is such a true-hearted fellow!

Clara. I cannot help it, I must treat him kindly. Often without a thought, I return the gentle, loving pressure of his hand. I reproach myself that I am deceiving

him, that I am nourishing in his heart a vain hope. I am in a sad plight! God knows, I do not willingly deceive him. I do not wish him to hope, yet I cannot let him despair!

Mother. That is not as it should be.

Clara. I liked him once, and in my soul I like him still I could have married him; yet I believe I was never really in love with him.

Mother. Thou wouldst always have been happy with him.

Clara. I should have been provided for, and have led a quiet life.

Mother. And through thy fault it has all been trifled away.

Clara, I am in a strange position. When I think how it has come to pass, I know it, indeed, and I know it not. But I have only to look upon Egmont, and I understand it all; ay, and stranger things would seem natural then. Oh, what a man he is! All the provinces worship him. And in his arms, should I not be the happiest creature in the world?

Mother. And how will it be in the future?

Clara. I only ask, does he love me?—does he love me?—as if there were any doubt about it.

Mother. One has nothing but anxiety of heart with one’s children. Always care and sorrow, whatever may be the end of it! It cannot come to good! Thou hast made thyself wretched! Thou hast made thy Mother wretched too.

Clara (quietly). Yet thou didst allow it in the beginning.

Mother. Alas! I was too indulgent; I am always too indulgent.

Clara. When Egmont rode by, and I ran to the window, did you chide me then? Did you not come to the window yourself? When he looked up, smiled, nodded, and greeted me, was it displeasing to you? Did you not feel yourself honoured in your daughter?

Mother. Go on with your reproaches.

Clara (with emotion). Then, when he passed more frequently, and we felt sure that it was on my account that he came this way, did you not remark it yourself with secret joy? Did you call me away when I stood behind the window-pane and awaited him?

Mother. Could I imagine that it would go so far?

Clara (with faltering voice, and repressed tears). And then, one evening, when, enveloped in his mantle, he surprised us as we sat at our lamp, who busied herself in receiving him, while I remained, lost in astonishment, as if fastened to my chair?

Mother. Could I imagine that the prudent Clara would so soon be carried away by this unhappy love? I must now endure that my daughter—

Clara (bursting into tears). Mother! How can you? You take pleasure in tormenting me!

Mother (weeping). Ay, weep away! Make me yet more wretched by thy grief. Is it not misery enough that my only daughter is a castaway?

Clara (rising, and speaking coldly). A castaway! The beloved of Egmont a castaway!—What princess would not envy the poor Clara a place in his heart? Oh, Mother,—my own Mother, you were not wont to speak thus! Dear Mother, be kind!—Let the people think, let the neighbours whisper what they like—this chamber, this lowly house is a paradise, since Egmont’s love dwelt here.

Mother. One cannot help liking him, that is true. He is always so kind, frank, and open-hearted.

Clara. There is not a drop of false blood in his veins. And then, Mother, he is indeed the great Egmont; yet, when he comes to me, how tender he is, how kind! How he tries to conceal from me his rank, his bravery! How anxious he is about me! so entirely the man, the friend, the lover. Mother. DO you expect him to-day?

Clara. Have you not seen how often I go to the window? Have you not noticed how I listen to every noise at the door?—Though I know that he will not come before night, yet, from the time when I rise in the morning, I keep expecting him every moment. Were I but a boy, to follow him always, to the court and

everywhere! Could I but carry his colours in the field!—

Mother. You were always such a lively, restless creature; even as a little child, now wild, now thoughtful. Will you not dress yourself a little better?

Clara. Perhaps, Mother, if I want something to do.—Yesterday, some of his people went by, singing songs in honour. At least his name was in the songs! The rest I could not understand. My heart leaped up into my throat,—I would fain have called them back if I had not felt ashamed.

Mother. Take care! Thy impetuous nature will ruin all. Thou wilt betray thyself before the people; as, not long ago, at thy cousin's, when thou roundest out the woodcut with the description, and didst exclaim, with a cry: "Count Egmont!"—I grew as red as fire.

Clara. Could I help crying out? It was the battle of Gravelines, and I found in the picture the letter C. and then looked for it in the description below. There it stood, "Count Egmont, with his horse shot under him." I shuddered, and afterwards I could not help laughing at the woodcut figure of Egmont, as tall as the neighbouring tower of Gravelines, and the English ships at the side.—When I remember how I used to conceive of a battle, and what an idea I had, as a girl, of Count Egmont; when I listened to descriptions of him, and of all the other earls and princes; —and think how it is with me now!

[Enter Brackenburg.

Clara. Well, what is going on?

Brackenburg. Nothing certain is known. It is rumoured that an insurrection has lately broken out in Flanders; the Regent is afraid of its spreading here. The castle is strongly garrisoned, the burghers are crowding to the gates, and the streets are thronged with people. I will hasten at once to my old father. (As if about to go.)

Clara. Shall we see you to-morrow? I must change my dress a little. I am expecting my cousin, and I look too untidy. Come, Mother, help me a moment. Take the book, Brackenburg, and bring me such another story.

Mother. Farewell.

Brackenburg (extending his hand). Your hand.

Clara (refusing hers). When you come next.

[Exeunt Mother and DAUGHTER.

Brackenburg (alone). I had resolved to go away again at once; and yet, when she takes me at my word, and lets me leave her, I feel as if I could go mad,—Wretched man! Does the fate of thy fatherland, does the growing disturbance fail to move thee?—Are countryman and Spaniard the same to thee? and carest thou not who rules, and who is in the right? I wad a different sort of fellow as a schoolboy! —Then, when an exercise in oratory was given; “Brutus’ Speech for Liberty,” for instance, Fritz was ever the first, and the rector would say: “If it were only spoken more deliberately, the words not all huddled together.”—Then my blood boiled, and longed for action.—Now I drag along, bound by the eyes of a maiden. I cannot leave her! yet she, alas, cannot love me!—ah—no–she—she cannot have entirely rejected me—not entirely—yet half love is no love!—I will endure it no longer!—Can it be true what a friend lately whispered in my ear, that she secretly admits a man into the house by night, when she always sends me away modestly before evening? No, it cannot be true! It is a lie! A base, slanderous lie! Clara is as innocent as I am wretched.—She has rejected me, has thrust me from her heart—and shall I live on thus? I cannot, I will not endure it. Already my native land is convulsed by internal strife, and do I perish abjectly amid the tumult? I will not endure it! When the trumpet sounds, when a shot falls, it thrills through my bone and marrow! But, alas, it does not rouse me! It does not summon me to join the onslaught, to rescue, to dare.—Wretched, degrading position! Better end it at once! Not long ago, I threw myself into the water; I sank — but nature in her agony was too strong for me; I felt that I could swim, and saved myself against my will. Could I but forget the time when she loved me, seemed to love me!—Why has this happiness penetrated my very bone and marrow? Why have these hopes, while disclosing to me a distant paradise, consumed all the enjoyment of life?—And that first, that only kiss!—Here (laying his hand upon the table), here we were alone,—she had always been kind and friendly towards me,—then she seemed to soften,— she looked at me,—my brain reeled,—I felt her lips on mine,—and —and now?—Die, wretch! Why dost thou hesitate? (He draws a phial from his pocket.) Thou healing poison, it shall not have been in vain that I stole thee from my brother’s medicine chest! From this anxious fear, this dizziness, this death-agony, thou shalt deliver me at once.

ACT II

SCENE I.—Square in Brussels

Jetter and a Master Carpenter (meeting)

Carpenter. Did I not tell you beforehand? Eight days ago, at the guild, I said there would be serious disturbances?

Jetter. Is it, then, true that they have plundered the churches in Flanders?

Carpenter. They have utterly destroyed both churches and chapels. They have left nothing standing but the four bare walls. The lowest rabble! And this it is that damages our good cause. We ought rather to have laid our claims before the Regent, formally and decidedly, and then have stood by them. If we speak now, if we assemble now, it will be said that we are joining the insurgents.

Jetter. Ay, so every one thinks at first. Why should you thrust your nose into the mess? The neck is closely connected with it.

Carpenter. I am always uneasy when tumults arise among the mob—among people who have nothing to lose. They use as a pretext that to which we also must appeal, and plunge the country in misery.

[Enter Soest.

Soest. Good day, sirs! What news? Is it true that the image-breakers are coming straight in this direction?

Carpenter. Here they shall touch nothing, at any rate.

Soest. A soldier came into my shop just now to buy tobacco; I questioned him about the matter. The Regent, though so brave and prudent a lady, has for once lost her presence of mind. Things must be bad indeed when she thus takes refuge behind her guards. The castle is strongly garrisoned. It is even rumoured that she means to fly from the town.

Carpenter. Forth she shall not go! Her presence protects us, and we will ensure

her safety better than her mustachioed gentry. If she only maintains our rights and privileges, we will stand faithfully by her.

[Enter a Soapboiler.

Soapboiler. An ugly business this! a bad business! Troubles are beginning; all things are going wrong! Mind you keep quiet, or they'll take you also for rioters.

Soest. Here come the seven wise men of Greece.

Soapboiler. I know there are many who in secret hold with the Calvinists, abuse the bishops, and care not for the king. But a loyal subject, a sincere Catholic!—

(By degrees others join the speakers, and listen.)

[Enter Vansen.

Vansen. God save you, sirs! What news?

Carpenter. Have nothing to do with him, he's a dangerous fellow.

Jetter. Is he not secretary to Dr. Wiets?

Carpenter. He has already had several masters. First he was a clerk, and as one patron after another turned him off, on account of his roguish tricks, he now dabbles in the business of notary and advocate, and is a brandy-drinker to boot. (More people gather round and stand in groups.)

Vansen. So here you are, putting your heads together. Well, it is worth talking about.

Soest. I think so too.

Vansen. Now if only one of you had heart and another head enough for the work, we might break the Spanish fetters at once.

Soest. Sirs! you must not talk thus. We have taken our oath to the king.

Vansen. And the king to us. Mark that!

Jetter. There's sense in that? Tell us your opinion.

Others. Hearken to him; he’s a clever fellow. He’s sharp enough. I had an old master once, who possessed a collection of parchments, among which were charters of ancient constitutions, contracts, and privileges. He set great store, too, by the rarest books. One of these contained our whole constitution; how, at first, we Netherlanders had princes of our own, who governed according to hereditary laws, rights, and usages; how our ancestors paid due honour to their sovereign so long as he governed them equitably; and how they were immediately on their guard the moment he was for overstepping his bounds. The states were down upon him at once; for every province, however small, had its own chamber and representatives.

Carpenter. Hold your tongue! We knew that long ago! Every honest citizen learns as much about the constitution as he needs.

Jetter. Let him speak; one may always learn something.

Soest. He is quite right.

Several Citizens. Go on! Go on! One does not hear this every day.

Vansen. You citizens, forsooth! You live only in the present; and as you tamely follow the trade inherited from your fathers, so you let the government do with you just as it pleases. You make no inquiry into the origin, the history, or the rights of a Regent; and in consequence of this negligence, the Spaniard has drawn the net over your ears.

Soest. Who cares for that, if one has only daily bread?

Jetter. The devil! Why did not some one come forward and tell us this in time?

Vansen. I tell it you now. The King of Spain, whose good fortune it is to bear sway over these provinces, has no right to govern them otherwise than the petty princes who formerly possessed them separately. Do you understand that?

Jetter. Explain it to us.

Vansen. Why, it is as dear as the sun. Must you not be governed according to your provincial laws? How comes that?

A Citizen. Certainly!

Vansen. Has not the burgher of Brussels a different law from the burgher of Antwerp? The burgher of Antwerp from the burgher of Ghent? How comes that?

Another Citizen. By heavens!

Vansen. But if you let matters run on thus, they will soon tell you a different story. Fie on you! Philip, through a woman, now ventures to do what neither Charles the Bold, Frederick the Warrior, nor Charles the Fifth could accomplish.

Soest. Yes, yes! The old princes tried it also.

Vansen. Ay! But our ancestors kept a sharp look-out. If they thought themselves aggrieved by their sovereign, they would perhaps get his son and heir into their hands, detain him as a hostage, and surrender him only on the most favourable conditions. Our fathers were men! They knew their own interests! They knew how to lay hold on what they wanted, and to get it established! They were men of the right sort! and hence it is that our privileges are so dearly defined, our liberties so well secured.

Soest. What are you saying about our liberties?

All. Our liberties! our privileges! Tell us about our privileges.

Vansen. All the provinces have their peculiar advantages, but we of Brabant are the most splendidly provided for. I have read it all.

Soest. Say on.

Jetter. Let us hear.

A Citizen. Pray do.

Vansen. First, it stands written:—The Duke of Brabant shall be to us a good and faithful sovereign.

Soest. Good! Stands it so?

Jetter. Faithful? Is that true?

Vansen. As I tell you. He is bound to us as we are to him. Secondly: In the

exercise of his authority he shall neither exert arbitrary power, nor exhibit caprice, himself, nor shall he, either directly or indirectly, sanction them in others.

Jetter. Bravo! Bravo! Not exert arbitrary power.

Soest. Nor exhibit caprice.

Another. And not sanction them in others! That is the main point. Not sanction them, either directly or indirectly.

Vansen. In express words.

Jetter. Get us the book.

A Citizen. Yes, we must see it.

Others. The book! The book!

Another. We will to the Regent with the book.

Another. Sir doctor, you shall be spokesman.

Soapboiler. Oh, the dolts!

Others. Something more out of the book!

Soapboiler. I'll knock his teeth down his throat if he says another word.

People. We'll see who dares to lay hands upon him. Tell us about our privileges! Have we any more privileges?

Vansen. Many, very good and very wholesome ones too. Thus it stands: The sovereign shall neither benefit the clergy, nor increase their number, without the consent of the nobles and of the states. Mark that! Nor shall he alter the constitution of the country.

Soest. Stands it so?

Vansen. I'll show it you, as it was written down two or three centuries ago.

A Citizen. And we tolerate the new bishops? The nobles must protect us, we will make a row else!

Others. And we suffer ourselves to be intimidated by the Inquisition?

Vansen. It is your own fault.

People. We have Egmont! We have Orange! They will protect our interests.

Vansen. Your brothers in Flanders are beginning the good work.

Soapboiler. Dog! (Strikes him.)

(Others oppose the Soapboiler, and exclaim,) Are you also a Spaniard?

Another. What! This honourable man?

Another. This learned man?

(They attack the Soapboiler.)

Carpenter. For heaven’s sake, peace!

(Others mingle in the fray.)

Carpenter. Citizens, what means this?

(Boys whistle, throw stones, set on dogs; citizens stand and gape, people come running up, others walk quietly to and fro, others play all sorts of pranks, shout and huzza.)

Others. Freedom and privilege! Privilege and freedom!

[Enter Egmont, with followers.

Egmont. Peace! Peace! good people. What is the matter? Peace, I say! Separate them.

Carpenter. My good lord, you come like an angel from heaven. Hush! See you nothing? Count Egmont! Honour to Count Egmont!

Egmont. Here, too! What are you about? Burgher against burgher! Does not even the neighbourhood of our royal mistress oppose a barrier to this frenzy? Disperse yourselves, and go about your business. ‘Tis a bad sign when you thus keep holiday on working days. How did the disturbance begin?

(The tumult gradually subsides, and the people gather around Egmont.)

Carpenter. They are fighting about their privileges.

Egmont. Which they will forfeit through their own folly,—and who are you? You seem honest people.

Carpenter. ‘Tis our wish to be so.

Egmont. Your calling?

Carpenter. A Carpenter, and master of the guild.

Egmont. And you?

Soest. A shopkeeper.

Egmont. And you? Jetter. A tailor.

Egmont. I remember, you were employed upon the liveries of my people. Your name is Jetter.

Jetter. To think of your grace remembering it!

Egmont. I do not easily forget any one whom I have seen or conversed with. Do what you can, good people, to keep the peace; you stand in bad repute enough already. Provoke not the king still farther. The power, after all, is in his hands. An honest burgher, who maintains himself industriously, has everywhere as much freedom as he wants.

Carpenter. That now is just our misfortune! With all due deference, your grace, ‘tis the idle portion of the community, your drunkards and vagabonds, who quarrel for want of something to do, and clamour about privilege because they are hungry; they impose upon the curious and the credulous, and, in order to obtain a pot of beer, excite disturbances that will bring misery upon thousands.

That is just what they want. We keep our houses and chests too well guarded; they would fain drive us away from them with fire-brands.

Egmont. You shall have all needful assistance; measures have been taken to stem the evil by force. Make a firm stand against the new doctrines, and do not imagine that privileges are secured by sedition, Remain at home; suffer no crowds to assemble in the streets. Sensible people can accomplish much.

(In the meantime the crowd has for the most part dispersed.)

Carpenter. Thanks, your excellency—thanks for your good opinion! We will do what in us lies. (Exit Egmont.) A gracious lord! A true Netherlander! Nothing of the Spaniard about him.

Jetter. If we had only him for a Regent? ‘Tis a pleasure to follow him.

Soest. The king won’t hear of that. He takes care to appoint his own people to the place.

Jetter. Did you notice his dress? It was of the newest fashion—after the Spanish cut.

Carpenter. A handsome gentleman.

Jetter. His head now were a dainty morsel for a headsman.

Soest. Are you mad? What are you thinking about?

Jetter. It is stupid enough that such an idea should come into one’s head! But so it is. Whenever I see a fine long neck, I cannot help thinking how well it would suit the block. These cursed executions! One cannot get them out of one’s head. When the lads are swimming, and I chance to see a naked back, I think forthwith of the dozens I have seen beaten with rods. If I meet a portly gentleman, I fancy I already see him roasting at the stake. At night, in my dreams, I am tortured in every limb; one cannot have a single hour’s enjoyment; all merriment and fun have long been forgotten. These terrible images seem burnt in upon my brain.

SCENE II.—Egmont’s residence

His Secretary (at a desk with papers. He rises impatiently)

Secretary. Still he comes not! And I have been waiting already full two hours, pen in hand, the paper before me; and just to-day I was anxious to be out so early. The floor burns under my feet. I can with difficulty restrain my impatience. “Be punctual to the hour:” Such was his parting injunction; now he comes not. There is so much business to get through, I shall not have finished before midnight. He overlooks one’s faults, it is true; methinks it would be better though, were he more strict, so he dismissed one at the appointed time. One could then arrange one’s plans. It is now full two hours since he left the Regent; who knows whom he may have chanced to meet by the way?

[Enter Egmont.

Egmont. Well, how do matters look?

Secretary. I am ready, and three couriers are waiting.

Egmont. I have detained you too long; you look somewhat out of humour.

Secretary. In obedience to your command I have already been in attendance for some time. Here are the papers!

Egmont. Donna Elvira will be angry with me, when she learns that I have detained you.

Secretary. You are pleased to jest.

Egmont. No, no. Be not ashamed. I admire your taste. She is pretty, and I have no objection that you should have a friend at the castle. What say the letters?

Secretary. Much, my lord, but withal little that is satisfactory.

Egmont. ‘Tis well that we have pleasures at home, we have the less occasion to seek them from abroad. Is there much that requires attention?

Secretary. Enough, my lord; three couriers are in attendance.

Egmont. Proceed! The most important.

Secretary. All is important.

Egmont. One after the other; only be prompt.

Secretary. Captain Breda sends an account of the occurrences that have further taken place in Ghent and the surrounding districts. The tumult is for the most part allayed.

Egmont. He doubtless reports individual acts of folly and temerity?

Secretary. He does, my lord.

Egmont. Spare me the recital.

Secretary. Six of the mob who tore down the image of the Virgin at Verviers have been arrested. He inquires whether they are to be hanged like the others.

Egmont. I am weary of hanging; let them be flogged and discharged.

Secretary. There are two women among them; are they to be flogged also?

Egmont. He may admonish them and let them go.

Secretary. Brink, of Breda's company, wants to marry; the captain hopes you will not allow it. There are so many women among the troops, he writes, that when on the march, they resemble a gang of gypsies rather than regular soldiers.

Egmont. We must overlook it in his case. He is a fine young fellow, and moreover entreated me so earnestly before I came away. This must be the last time, however; though it grieves me to refuse the poor fellows their best pastime; they have enough without that to torment them.

Secretary. Two of your people, Seter and Hart, have ill-treated a damsel, the daughter of an inn-keeper. They got her alone and she could not escape from them.

Egmont. If she be an honest maiden and they used violence, let them be flogged three days in succession; and if they have any property, let him retain as much of it as will portion the girl.

Secretary. One of the foreign preachers has been discovered passing secretly through Comines. He swore that he was on the point of leaving for France. According to orders, he ought to be beheaded.

Egmont. Let him be conducted quietly to the frontier, and there admonished that, the next time, he will not escape so easily.

Secretary. A letter from your steward. He writes that money comes in slowly, he can with difficulty send you the required sum within the week; the late disturbances have thrown everything into the greatest confusion,

Egmont. Money must be had! It is for him to look to the means.

Secretary. He says he will do his utmost, and at length proposes to sue and imprison Raymond, who has been so long in your debt.

Egmont. But he has promised to pay!

Secretary. The last time he fixed a fortnight himself.

Egmont. Well, grant him another fortnight; after that he may proceed against him.

Secretary. You do well. His non-payment of the money proceeds not from inability, but from want of inclination. He will trifle no longer when he sees that you are in earnest. The steward further proposes to withhold, for half a month, the pensions which you allow to the old soldiers, widows, and others. In the meantime some expedient may be devised; they must make their arrangements accordingly.

Egmont. But what arrangements can be made here? These poor people want the money more than I do. He must not think of it.

Secretary. How then, my lord, is he to raise the required sum?

Egmont. It is his business to think of that. He was told so in a former letter.

Secretary. And therefore he makes these proposals.

Egmont. They will never do;—he must think of something else. Let him suggest

expedients that are admissible, and, before all, let him procure the money.

Secretary. I have again before me the letter from Count Oliva. Pardon my recalling it to your remembrance. Before all others, the aged count deserves a detailed reply. You proposed writing to him with your own hand. Doubtless, he loves you as a father.

Egmont. I cannot command the time;—and of all detestable things, writing is to me the most detestable. You imitate my hand so admirably, do you write in my name. I am expecting Orange. I cannot do it;—I wish, however, that something soothing should be written, to allay his fears.

Secretary. Just give me a notion of what you wish to communicate; I will at once draw up the answer, and lay it before you. It shall be so written that it might pass for your hand in a court of justice.

Egmont. Give me the letter. (After glancing over it.) Dear, excellent, old man! Wert thou then so cautious in thy youth? Didst thou never mount a breach? Didst thou remain in the rear of battle at the suggestion of prudence?— What affectionate solicitude! He has indeed my safety and happiness at heart, but considers not, that he who lives but to save his life, is already dead.—Charge him not to be anxious on my account; I act as circumstances require, and shall be upon my guard. Let him use his influence at court in my favour, and be assured of my warmest thanks.

Secretary. Is that all? He expects still more.

Egmont. What can I say? If you choose to write more fully, do so. The matter turns upon a single point; he would have me live as I cannot live. That I am joyous, live fast, take matters easily, is my good fortune; nor would! exchange it for the safety of a sepulchre. My blood rebels against the Spanish mode of life, nor have I the least inclination to regulate my movements by the new and cautious measures of the court. Do I live only to think of life? Am I to forego the enjoyment of the present moment in order to secure the next? And must that in its turn be consumed in anxieties and idle fears?

Secretary. I entreat you, my lord, be not so harsh towards the venerable man. You are wont to be friendly towards every one. Say a kindly word to allay the anxiety of your noble friend. See how considerate he is, with what delicacy he warns you.

Egmont. Yet he harps continually on the same string. He knows of old how I detest these admonitions. They serve only to perplex and are of no avail. What if I were a somnambulist, and trod the giddy summit of a lofty house,—were it the part of friendship to call me by my name, to warn me of my danger, to waken, to kill me? Let each choose his own path, and provide for his own safety.

Secretary. It may become you to be without a fear, but those who know and love you—

Egmont (looking over the letter). Then he recalls the old story of our sayings and doings, one evening, in the wantonness of conviviality and wine; and what conclusions and inferences were thence drawn and circulated throughout the whole kingdom! Well, we had a cap and bells embroidered on the sleeves of our servants' liveries, and afterwards exchanged this senseless device for a bundle of arrows;—a still more dangerous symbol for those who are bent upon discovering a meaning where nothing is meant, These and similar follies were conceived and brought forth in a moment of merriment. It was at our suggestion that a noble troop, with beggars' wallets, and a self-chosen nickname, with mock humility recalled the King's duty to his remembrance. It was at our suggestion too—well, what does it signify? Is a carnival jest to be construed into high treason? Are we to be grudged the scanty, variegated rags, wherewith a youthful spirit and heated imagination would adorn the poor nakedness of life? Take life too seriously, and what is it worth? If the morning wake us to no new joys, if in the evening we have no pleasures to hope for, is it worth the trouble of dressing and undressing? Does the sun shine on me to-day, that I may reflect on what happened yesterday? That I may endeavour to foresee and control, what can neither be foreseen nor controlled,—the destiny of the morrow? Spare me these reflections, we will leave them to scholars and courtiers. Let them ponder and contrive, creep hither and thither, and surreptitiously achieve their ends.—If you can make use of these suggestions, without swelling your letter into a volume, it is well. Everything appears of exaggerated importance to the good old man. 'Tis thus the friend, who has long held our hand, grasps it more warmly ere he quits his hold.

Secretary. Pardon me, the pedestrian grows dizzy when he beholds the charioteer drive past with whirling speed.

Egmont. Child! Child! Forbear! As if goaded by invisible spirits, the sun-steeds of time bear onward the light car of our destiny; and nothing remains for us but, with calm self-possession, firmly to grasp the reins, and now right, now left, to

steer the wheels here from the precipice and there from the rock. Whither he is hasting, who knows? Does any one consider whence he came?

Secretary. My lord! my lord!

Egmont. I stand high, but I can and must rise yet higher. Courage, strength, and hope possess my soul. Not yet have I attained the height of my ambition; that once achieved, I will stand firmly and without fear. Should I fall, should a thunder-clap, a storm-blast, ay, a false step of my own, precipitate me into the abyss, so be it! I shall lie there with thousands of others. I have never disdained, even for a trifling stake, to throw the bloody die with my gallant comrades; and shall I hesitate now, when all that is most precious in life is set upon the cast?

Secretary. Oh, my lord! you know not what you say! May Heaven protect you!

Egmont Collect your papers. Orange is coming. Dispatch what is most urgent, that the couriers may set forth before the gates are closed. The rest may wait. Leave the Count's letter till to-morrow. Fail not to visit Elvira, and greet her from me. Inform yourself concerning the Regent's health. She cannot be well, though she would fain conceal it.

[Exit Secretary.

[Enter Orange.

Egmont. Welcome, Orange; you appear somewhat disturbed.

Orange. What say you to our conference with the Regent?

Egmont. I found nothing extraordinary in her manner of receiving us. I have often seen her thus before. She appeared to me to be somewhat indisposed.

Orange. Marked you not that she was more reserved than usual? She began by cautiously approving our conduct during the late insurrection; glanced at the false light in which, nevertheless, it might be viewed; and finally turned the discourse to her favourite topic—that her gracious demeanour, her friendship for us Netherlanders, had never been sufficiently recognized, never appreciated as it deserved; that nothing came to a prosperous issue; that for her part she was beginning to grow weary of it; that the king must at last resolve upon other measures. Did you hear that?

Egmont. Not all; I was thinking at the time of something else. She is a woman, good Orange, and all women expect that every one shall submit passively to their gentle yoke; that every Hercules shall lay aside his lion's skin, assume the distaff, and swell their train; and, because they are themselves peaceably inclined, imagine forsooth, that the ferment which seizes a nation, the storm which powerful rivals excite against one another, may be allayed by one soothing word, and the most discordant elements be brought to unite in tranquil harmony at their feet. 'Tis thus with her; and since she cannot accomplish her object, why she has no resource left but to lose her temper, to menace us with direful prospects for the future, and to threaten to take her departure.

Orange. Think you not that this time she will fulfil her threat?

Egmont. Never! How often have I seen her actually prepared for the journey? Whither should she go? Being here a stadtholder, a queen, think you that she could endure to spend her days in insignificance at her brother's court, or to repair to Italy, and there drag on her existence among her old family connections?

Orange. She is held incapable of this determination, because you have already seen her hesitate and draw back; nevertheless, it lies in her to take this step; new circumstances may impel her to the long-delayed resolve. What if she were to depart, and the king to send another?

Egmont. Why, he would come, and he also would have business enough upon his hands. He would arrive with vast projects and schemes to reduce all things to order, to subjugate and combine; and to-day he would be occupied with this trifle, to-morrow with that, and the day following have to deal with some unexpected hindrance. He would spend one month in forming plans, another in mortification at their failure, and half a year would be consumed in cares for a single province. With him also time would pass, his head grow dizzy, and things hold on their ordinary course, till instead of sailing into the open sea, according to the plan which he had previously marked out, he might thank if, amid the tempest, he were able to keep his vessel off the rocks.

Orange. What if the king were advised to try an experiment?

Egmont. Which should be—?

Orange. To try how the body would get on without the head.

Egmont. How?

Orange. Egmont, our interests have for years weighed upon my heart; I ever stand as over a chess-board, and regard no move of my adversary as insignificant; and as men of science carefully investigate the secrets of nature, so I hold it to be the duty, ay, the very vocation of a prince, to acquaint himself with the dispositions and intentions of all parties. I have reason to fear an outbreak. The king has long acted according to certain principles; he finds that they do not lead to a prosperous issue; what more probable than that he should seek it some other way?

Egmont. I do not believe it. When a man grows old, has attempted much, and finds that the world cannot be made to move according to his will, he must needs grow weary of it at last.

Orange. One thing has yet to be attempted.

Egmont. What?

Orange. To spare the people, and to put an end to the princes.

Egmont. How many have long been haunted by this dread? There is no cause for such anxiety.

Orange. Once I felt anxious; gradually I became suspicious; suspicion has at length grown into certainty.

Egmont. Has the king more faithful servants than ourselves?

Orange. We serve him after our own fashion; and, between ourselves, it must be confessed that we understand pretty well how to make the interests of the king square with our own.

Egmont. And who does not? He has our duty and submission, in so far as they are his due.

Orange. But what if he should arrogate still more, and regard as disloyalty what we esteem the maintenance of our just rights?

Egmont. We shall know in that case how to defend ourselves. Let him assemble

the Knights of the Golden Fleece; we will submit ourselves to their decision.

Orange. What if the sentence were to precede the trial? punishment, the sentence?

Egmont. It were an injustice of which Philip is incapable; a folly which I cannot impute either to him or to his counsellors.

Orange. And how if they were both unjust and foolish?

Egmont. No, Orange, it is impossible. Who would venture to lay hands on us? The attempt to capture us were a vain and fruitless enterprize. No, they dare not raise the standard of tyranny so high. The breeze that should waft these tidings over the land would kindle a mighty conflagration. And what object would they have in view? The king alone has no power either to judge or to condemn us and would they attempt our lives by assassination? They cannot intend it. A terrible league would unite the entire people. Direful hate and eternal separation from the crown of Spain would, on the instant, be forcibly declared.

Orange. The flames would then rage over our grave, and the blood of our enemies flow, a vain oblation. Let us consider, Egmont.

Egmont. But how could they effect this purpose?

Orange. Alva is on the way.

Egmont. I do not believe it.

Orange. I know it.

Egmont. The Regent appeared to know nothing of it.

Orange. And, therefore, the stronger is my conviction. The Regent will give place to him. I know his blood-thirsty disposition, and he brings an army with him.

Egmont. To harass the provinces anew? The people will be exasperated to the last degree.

Orange. Their leaders will be secured.

Egmont. No! No!

Orange. Let us retire, each to his province. There we can strengthen ourselves; the Duke will not begin with open violence.

Egmont. Must we not greet him when he comes?

Orange. We will delay.

Egmont. What if, on his arrival, he should summon us in the king’s name?

Orange. We will answer evasively.

Egmont. And if he is urgent?

Orange. We will excuse ourselves.

Egmont. And if he insist?

Orange. We shall be the less disposed to come.

Egmont. Then war is declared; and we are rebels. Do not suffer prudence to mislead you, Orange. I know it is not fear that makes you yield. Consider this step.

Orange. I have considered it.

Egmont. Consider for what you are answerable if you are wrong. For the most fatal war that ever yet desolated a country. Your refusal is the signal that at once summons the provinces to arms, that justifies every cruelty for which Spain has hitherto so anxiously sought a pretext. With a single nod you will excite to the direst confusion what, with patient effort, we have so long kept in abeyance. Think of the towns, the nobles, the people; think of commerce, agriculture, trade! Realize the murder, the desolation! Calmly the soldier beholds his comrade fall beside him in the battlefield. But towards you, carried downwards by the stream, shall float the corpses of citizens, of children, of maidens, till, aghast with horror, you shall no longer know whose cause you are defending, since you shall see those, for whose liberty you drew the sword, perishing around you. And what will be your emotions when conscience whispers, “It was for my own safety that I drew it “?

Orange. We are not ordinary men, Egmont. If it becomes us to sacrifice ourselves for thousands, it becomes us no less to spare ourselves for thousands.

Egmont. He who spares himself becomes an object of suspicion ever to himself.

Orange. He who is sure of his own motives can, with confidence, advance or retreat.

Egmont. Your own act will render certain the evil that you dread.

Orange. Wisdom and courage alike prompt us to meet an inevitable evil.

Egmont. When the danger is imminent the faintest hope should be taken into account.

Orange We have not the smallest footing left; we are on the very brink of the precipice.

Egmont. Is the king’s favour on ground so narrow?

Orange. Not narrow, perhaps, but slippery.

Egmont. By heavens! he is belied. I cannot endure that he should be so meanly thought of! He is Charles’s son, and incapable of meanness.

Orange. Kings of course do nothing mean.

Egmont. He should be better known.

Orange. Our knowledge counsels us not to await the result of a dangerous experiment.

Egmont. No experiment is dangerous, the result of which we have the courage to meet.

Orange. You are irritated, Egmont.

Egmont. I must see with my own eyes.

Orange. Oh that for once you saw with mine! My friend, because your eyes are open, you imagine that you see. I go! Await Alva’s arrival, and God be with you!

My refusal to do so may perhaps save you. The dragon may deem the prey not worth seizing, if he cannot swallow us both. Perhaps he may delay, in order more surely to execute his purpose; in the meantime you may see matters in their true light. But then, be prompt! Lose not a moment! Save,—oh, save yourself! Farewell!—Let nothing escape your vigilance:—how many troops he brings with him; how he garrisons the town; what force the Regent retains; how your friends are prepared. Send me tidings—Egmont-Egmont. What would you?

Orange (grasping his hand). Be persuaded! Go with me!

Egmont. How! Tears, Orange!

Orange. To weep for a lost friend is not unmanly.

Egmont. You deem me lost?

Orange. You are lost! Consider! Only a brief respite is left you. Farewell.

[Exit.

Egmont (alone). Strange that the thoughts of other men should exert such an influence over us. These fears would never have entered my mind; and this man infects me with his solicitude. Away! ‘Tis a foreign drop in my blood! Kind nature, cast it forth! And to erase the furrowed lines from my brow there yet remains indeed a friendly means.

ACT III

Scene I.—Palace of the Regent

Margaret of Parma

Regent. I might have expected it. Ha! when we live immersed in anxiety and toil, we imagine that we achieve the utmost that is possible; while he, who, from a distance, looks on and commands, believes that he requires only the possible. O ye kings! I had not thought it could have galled me thus. It is so sweet to reign!—and to abdicate? I know not how my father could do so; but I will also.

Machiavel appears in the background

Regent. Approach, Machiavel. I am thinking over this letter from my brother.

Machiavel. May I know what it contains?

Regent. As much tender consideration for me as anxiety for his states. He extols the firmness, the industry, the fidelity, with which I have hitherto watched over the interests of his Majesty in these provinces. He condoles with me that the unbridled people occasion me so much trouble. He is so thoroughly convinced of the depth of my views, so extraordinarily satisfied with the prudence of my conduct, that I must almost say the letter is too politely written for a king—certainly for a brother.

Machiavel. It is not the first time that he has testified to you his just satisfaction.

Regent. But the first time that it is a mere rhetorical figure.

Machiavel. I do not understand you.

Regent. You soon will.—For after this preamble he is of opinion that without soldiers, without a small army indeed,–I shall always cut a sorry figure here! We did wrong, he says, to withdraw our troops from the provinces at the remonstrance of the inhabitants; a garrison, he thinks, which shall press upon the neck of the burgher, will prevent him, by its weight, from making any lofty spring.

Machiavel. It would irritate the public mind to the last degree.

Regent. The king thinks, however, do you hear?—he thinks that a clever general, one who never listens to reason, will be able to deal promptly with all parties;—people and nobles, citizens and peasants; he therefore sends, with a powerful army, the Duke of Alva.

Machiavel. Alva?

Regent. You are surprised.

Machiavel. You say, he sends, he asks doubtless whether he should send.

Regent. The king asks not, he sends.

Machiavel. You will then have an experienced warrior in your service.

Regent. In my service? Speak out, Machiavel.

Machiavel. I would not anticipate you.

Regent. And I would I could dissimulate. It wounds me —wounds me to the quick. I had rather my brother would speak his mind than attach his signature to formal epistles drawn up by a Secretary of state.

Machiavel. Can they not comprehend?—

Regent. I know them both within and without. They would fain make a clean sweep; and since they cannot set about it themselves, they give their confidence to any one who comes with a besom in his hand. Oh, it seems to me as if I saw the king and his council worked upon this tapestry.

Machiavel. So distinctly!

Regent. No feature is wanting. There are good men among them. The honest Roderigo, so experienced and so moderate, who does not aim too high, yet lets nothing sink too low; the upright Alonzo, the diligent Freneda, the steadfast Las Vargas, and others who join them when the good party are in power. But there sits the hollow-eyed Toledan, with brazen front and deep fire-glance, muttering between his teeth about womanish softness, ill-timed concession, and that

women can ride trained steeds, well enough, but are themselves bad masters of the horse, and the like pleasantries, which, in former times, I have been compelled to hear from political gentlemen.

Machiavel. You have chosen good colours for your picture.

Regent. Confess, Machiavel, among the tints from which I might select, there is no hue so livid, so jaundice-like, as Alva's complexion, and the colour he is wont to paint with. He regards every one as a blasphemer or traitor, for under this head they can all be racked, impaled, quartered, and burnt at pleasure. The good I have accomplished here appears as nothing seen from a distance, just because it is good. Then he dwells on every outbreak that is past, recalls every disturbance that is quieted, and brings before the king such a picture of mutiny, sedition, and audacity, that we appear to him to he actually devouring one another, when with us the transient explosion of a rude people has long been forgotten. Thus he conceives a cordial hatred for the poor people; he views them with horror, as beasts and monsters; looks around for fire and sword, and imagines that by such means human beings are subdued.

Machiavel. You appear to me too vehement; you take the matter too seriously. Do you not remain Regent?

Regent. I am aware of that. He will bring his instructions. I am old enough in state affairs to understand how people can be supplanted, without being actually deprived of office. First, he will produce a commission, couched in terms somewhat obscure and equivocal; he will stretch his authority, for the power is in his hands; if I complain, he will hint at secret instructions; if I desire to see them, he will answer evasively; if I insist, he will produce a paper of totally different import; and if this fail to satisfy me, he will go on precisely as if I had never interfered. Meanwhile he will have accomplished what I dread, and have frustrated my most cherished schemes.

Machiavel. I wish I could contradict you.

Regent. His harshness and cruelty will again arouse the turbulent spirit, which, with unspeakable patience, I have succeeded in quelling; I shall see my work destroyed before my eyes, and have besides to bear the blame of his wrongdoing.

Machiavel. Await it, your Highness.

Regent. I have sufficient self-command to remain quiet. Let him come; I will make way for him with the best grace ere he pushes me aside.

Machiavel. So important a step thus suddenly? Regent. ‘Tis harder than you imagine. He who is accustomed to rule, to hold daily in his hand the destiny of thousands, descends from the throne as into the grave. Better thus, however, than linger a spectre among the living, and with hollow aspect endeavour to maintain a place which another has inherited, and already possesses and enjoys.

SCENE II.—Clara’s dwelling

Clara and her Mother

Mother. Such a love as Brackenburg’s I have never seen; I thought it was to be found only in romance books.

Clara (walking up and down the room, humming a song). With love’s thrilling rapture What joy can compare!

Mother. He suspects thy attachment to Egmont; and yet, if thou wouldst but treat him a little kindly, I do believe he would marry thee still, if thou wouldst have him.

Clara (sings). Blissful And tearful, With thought-teeming brain; Hoping And fearing In passionate pain; Now shouting in triumph, Now sunk in despair;— With love’s thrilling rapture What joy can compare!

Mother. Have done with such baby-nonsense!

Clara. Nay, do not abuse it; ‘tis a song of marvellous virtue. Many a time have I lulled a grown child to sleep with it.

Mother. Ay! Thou canst think of nothing but thy love. If it only did not put everything else out of thy head. Thou shouldst have more regard for Brackenburg, I tell thee. He may make thee happy yet some day.

Clara. He?

Mother. Oh, yes! A time will come! You children live only in the present, and give no ear to our experience. Youth and happy love, all has an end; and there comes a time when one thanks God if one has any comer to creep into.

Clara (shudders, and after a pause stands up). Mother, let that time come— like death. To think of it beforehand is horrible! And if it come! If we must—then— we will bear ourselves as we may. Live without thee, Egmont! (Weeping.) No! It is impossible.

[Enter Egmont (enveloped in a horseman's cloak, his hat drawn over his face).

Egmont. Clara!

Clara (utters a cry and starts back). Egmont! (She hastens towards him.) Egmont! (She embraces and leans upon him.) O thou good, kind, sweet Egmont! Art thou come? Art thou here indeed!

Egmont. Good evening, Mother?

Mother. God save you, noble sir! My daughter has well-nigh pined to death, because you have stayed away so long; she talks and sings about you the live-long day.

Egmont. You will give me some supper?

Mother. You do us too much honour. If we only had anything—

Clara. Certainly! Be quiet, Mother; I have provided everything; there is something prepared. Do not betray me, Mother.

Mother. There's little enough.

Clara. Never mind! And then I think when he is with me I am never hungry; so he cannot, I should think, have any great appetite when I am with him.

Egmont. Do you think so? (Clara stamps with her foot and turns pettishly away.) What ails you?

Clara. How cold you are to-day! You have not yet offered me a kiss. Why do you keep your arms enveloped in your mantle, like a new-born babe? It becomes

neither a soldier nor a lover to keep his arms muffled up.

Egmont. Sometimes, dearest, sometimes. When the soldier stands in ambush and would delude the foe, he collects his thoughts, gathers his mantle around him, and matures his plan and a lover—

Mother. Will you not take a seat, and make yourself comfortable? I must to the kitchen, Clara thinks of nothing when you are here. You must put up with what we have.

Egmont. Your goodwill is the best seasoning.

[Exit Mother.

Clara. And what then is my love?

Egmont. Just what thou wilt.

Clara. Liken it to anything, if you have the heart.

Egmont. But first. (He flings aside his mantle, and appears arrayed in a magnificent dress.)

Clara. Oh heavens!

Egmont. Now my arms are free! (Embraces her.) Clara. Don’t! You will spoil your dress. (She steps back.) How magnificent! I dare not touch you. Egmont. Art thou satisfied? I promised to come once arrayed in Spanish fashion.

Clara. I had ceased to remind you of it; I thought you did not like it—ah, and the Golden Fleece!

Egmont. Thou seest it now. Clara. And did the emperor really hang it round thy neck!

Egmont. He did, my child! And this chain and Order invest the wearer with the noblest privileges. On earth I acknowledge no judge over my actions, except the grand master of the Order, with the assembled chapter of knights. Clara. Oh, thou mightest let the whole world sit in judgment over thee. The velvet is too splendid! and the braiding! and the embroidery! One knows not where to begin.

Egmont. There, look thy fill. Clara. And the Golden Fleece! You told me its history, and said it is the symbol of everything great and precious, of everything that can be merited and won by diligence and toil. It is very precious—I may liken it to thy love;—even so I wear it next my heart;—and then—

Egmont. What wilt thou say?

Clara. And then again it is not like.

Egmont. How so?

Clara. I have not won it by diligence and toil, I have not deserved it.

Egmont. It is otherwise in love. Thou dost deserve it because thou hast not sought it—and, for the most part, those only obtain love who seek it not.

Clara. Is it from thine own experience that thou hast learned this? Didst thou make that proud remark in reference to thyself? Thou, whom all the people love?

Egmont. Would that I had done something for them! That I could do anything for them! It is their own good pleasure to love me.

Clara. Thou hast doubtless been with the Regent to-day?

Egmont. I have.

Clara. Art thou upon good terms with her?

Egmont So it would appear. We are kind and serviceable to each other.

Clara. And in thy heart?

Egmont. I like her. True, we have each our own views; but that is nothing to the purpose. She is an excellent woman, knows with whom she has to deal, and would be penetrating enough were she not quite so suspicious. I give her plenty of employment, because she is always suspecting some secret motive in my conduct when, in fact, I have none.

Clara. Really none?

Egmont. Well, with one little exception, perhaps. All wine deposits lees in the

cask in the course of time. Orange furnishes her still better entertainment, and is a perpetual riddle. He has got the credit of harbouring some secret design; and she studies his brow to discover his thoughts, and his steps, to learn in what direction they are bent.

Clara. Does she dissemble?

Egmont. She is Regent—and do you ask?

Clara. Pardon me; I meant to say, is she false?

Egmont. Neither more nor less than everyone who has his own objects to attain.

Clara. I should never feel at home in the world. But she has a masculine spirit, and is another sort of woman from us housewives and sempstresses. She is great, steadfast, resolute.

Egmont. Yes, when matters are not too much involved. For once, however, she is a little disconcerted.

Clara. How so?

Egmont. She has a moustache, too, on her upper lip, and occasionally an attack of the gout. A regular Amazon.

Clara. A majestic woman! I should dread to appear before her.

Egmont. Yet thou art not wont to be timid! It would not be fear, only maidenly bashfulness.

(Clara casts down her eyes, takes his hand, and leans upon him.)

Egmont. I understand thee, dearest! Thou mayst raise thine eyes. (He kisses her eyes.)

Clara. Let me be silent! Let me embrace thee! Let me look into thine eyes, and find there everything—hope and comfort, joy and sorrow! (She embraces and gazes on him.) Tell me! Oh, tell me! It seems so strange—art thou indeed Egmont! Count Egmont! The great Egmont, who makes so much noise in the world, who figures in the newspapers, who is the support and stay of the

provinces?

Egmont. No, Clara, I am not he.

Clara. How?

Egmont. Seest thou, Clara? Let me sit down! (He seats himself, she kneels on a footstool before him, rests her arms on his knees and looks up in his face.) That Egmont is a morose, cold, unbending Egmont, obliged to be upon his guard, to assume now this appearance and now that; harassed, misapprehended and perplexed, when the crowd esteem him light-hearted and gay; beloved by a people who do not know their own minds; honoured and extolled by the intractable multitude; surrounded by friends in whom he dares not confide; observed by men who are on the watch to supplant him; toiling and striving, often without an object, generally without a reward. O let me conceal how it fares with him, let me not speak of his feelings! But this Egmont, Clara, is calm, unreserved, happy, beloved and known by the best of hearts, which is also thoroughly known to him, and which he presses to his own with unbounded confidence and love. (He embraces her.) This is thy Egmont.

Clara. So let me die! The world has no joy after this!

ACT IV

SCENE I.—A Street

Jetter, Carpenter

Jetter. Hist! neighbour,—a word!

Carpenter. Go your way and be quiet.

Jetter. Only one word. Is there nothing new?

Carpenter. Nothing, except that we are anew forbidden to speak.

Jetter. How?

Carpenter. Step here, close to this house. Take heed! Immediately on his arrival, the Duke of Alva published a decree, by which two or three, found conversing together in the streets, are without trial, declared guilty of high treason.

Jetter. Alas!

Carpenter. To speak of state affairs is prohibited on pain of perpetual imprisonment.

Jetter. Alas for our liberty!

Carpenter. And no one, on pain of death, shall censure the measures of government.

Jetter. Alas, for our heads!

Carpenter. And fathers, Mothers, children, kindred, friends, and servants, are invited, by the promise of large rewards, to disclose what passes in the privacy of our homes, before an expressly appointed tribunal.

Jetter. Let us go home.

Carpenter. And the obedient are promised that they shall suffer no injury, either

in person or estate.

Jetter. How gracious!–I felt ill at ease the moment the duke entered the town. Since then, it has seemed to me, as though the heavens were covered with black crape, which hangs so low, that one must stoop down to avoid knocking one's head against it.

Carpenter. And how do you like his soldiers? They are a different sort of crabs from those we have been used to.

Jetter. Faugh! It gives one the cramp at one's heart to see such a troop march down the street. As straight as tapers, with fixed look, only one step, however many there may be; and when they stand sentinel, and you pass one of them, it seems as though he would look you through and through; and he looks so stiff and morose, that you fancy you see a task-master at every corner. They offend my sight. Our militia were merry fellows; they took liberties, stood their legs astride, their hats over their ears, they lived and let live; these fellows are like machines with a devil inside them.

Carpenter. Were such an one to cry, "Halt!" and level his musket, think you one would stand?

Jetter. I should fall dead upon the spot.

Carpenter. Let us go home!

Jetter No good can come of it. Farewell.

[Enter Soest.

Soest. Friends! Neighbours! Carpenter. Hush! Let us go.

Soest. Have you heard?

Jetter. Only too much!

Soest. The Regent is gone.

Jetter. Then Heaven help us.

Carpenter. She was some stay to us.

Soest. Her departure was sudden and secret. She could not agree with the duke; she has sent word to the nobles that she intends to return. No one believes it, however.

Carpenter. God pardon the nobles for letting this new yoke be laid upon our necks. They might have prevented it. Our privileges are gone.

Jetter. For Heaven’s sake not a word about privileges. I already scent an execution; the sun will not come forth; the fogs are rank.

Soest. Orange, too, is gone.

Carpenter. Then are we quite deserted!

Soest, Count Egmont is still here.

Jetter. God be thanked! Strengthen him, all ye saints, to do his utmost; he is the only one who can help us.

[Enter Vansen.

Vansen. Have I at length found a few brave citizens who have not crept out of sight?

Jetter. Do us the favour to pass on.

Vansen. You are not civil.

Jetter. This is no time for compliments. Does your back itch again? are your wounds already healed?

Vansen. Ask a soldier about his wounds? Had I cared for blows, nothing good would have come of me.

Jetter. Matters may grow more serious.

Vansen. You feel from the gathering storm a pitiful weakness in your limbs, it seems.

Carpenter. Your limbs will soon be in motion elsewhere, if you do not keep quiet.

Vansen. Poor mice! The master of the house procures a new cat, and ye are straight in despair! The difference is very trifling; we shall get on as we did before, only be quiet.

Carpenter. You are an insolent knave.

Vansen. Gossip! Let the duke alone. The old cat looks as though he had swallowed devils, instead of mice, and could not now digest them. Let him alone, I say; he must eat, drink, and sleep, like other men. I am not afraid if we only watch our opportunity, At first he makes quick work Of it; by-and-by, however, he too will find that it is pleasanter to live in the larder, among flitches of bacon, and to rest by night, than to entrap a few solitary mice in the granary. Go to! I know the stadtholders.

Carpenter. What such a fellow can say with impunity! Had I said such a thing, I should not hold myself safe a moment.

Vansen. Do not make yourselves uneasy! God in heaven does not trouble himself about you, poor worms, much less the Regent.

Jetter. Slanderer!

Vansen. I know some for whom it would be better if, instead of their own high spirits, they had a little tailor’s blood in their veins.

Carpenter. What mean you by that?

Vansen. Hum! I mean the count.

Jetter. Egmont! What has he to fear?

Vansen. I’m a poor devil, and could live a whole year round on what he loses in a single night; yet he would do well to give me his revenue for a twelvemonth, to have my head upon his shoulders for one quarter of an hour.

Jetter. You think yourself very clever; yet there is more sense in the hairs of Egmont’s head, than in your brains.

Vansen. Perhaps so! Not more shrewdness, however. These gentry are the most apt to deceive themselves. He should be more chary of his confidence.

Jetter. How his tongue wags! Such a gentleman!

Vansen. Just because he is not a tailor.

Jetter. You audacious scoundrel!

Vansen. I only wish he had your courage in his limbs for an hour to make him uneasy, and plague and torment him, till he were compelled to leave the town.

Jetter. What nonsense you talk; why he's as safe as a star in heaven.

Vansen. Have you ever seen one snuff itself out? Off it went!

Carpenter. Who would dare to meddle with him?

Vansen. Will you interfere to prevent it? Will you stir up an insurrection if he is arrested?

Jetter. Ah!

Vansen. Will you risk your ribs for his sake?

Soest. Eh!

Vansen (mimicking them). Eh! Oh! Ah! Run through the alphabet in your wonderment. So it is, and so it will remain. Heaven help him!

Jetter. Confound your impudence. Can such a noble, upright man have anything to fear?

Vansen. In this world the rogue has everywhere the advantage. At the bar, he makes a fool of the judge; on the bench, he takes pleasure in convicting the accused. I have had to copy out a protocol, where the commissary was handsomely rewarded by the court, both with praise and money, because through his cross-examination, an honest devil, against whom they had a grudge, was made out to be a rogue.

Carpenter. Why, that again is a downright lie. What can they want to get out of a

man if he is innocent?

Vansen. Oh, you blockhead! When nothing can be worked out of a man by cross-examination, they work it into him. Honesty is rash and withal somewhat presumptuous; at first they question quietly enough, and the prisoner, proud of his innocence, as they call it, comes out with much that a sensible man would keep back! then, from these answers the inquisitor proceeds to put new questions, and is on the watch for the slightest contradiction; there he fastens his line; and, let the poor devil lose his self-possession, say too much here, or too little there, or, Heaven knows from what whim or other, let him withhold some trifling circumstance, or at any moment give way to fear—then we're on the right track, and, I assure you, no beggar-woman seeks for rags among the rubbish with more care than such a fabricator of rogues, from trifling, crooked, disjointed, misplaced, misprinted, and concealed facts and information, acknowledged or denied, endeavours at length to patch up a scarecrow, by means of which he may at least hang his victim in effigy; and the poor devil may thank Heaven if he is in a condition to see himself hanged.

Jetter. He has a ready tongue of his own.

Carpenter. This may serve well enough with flies. Wasps laugh at your cunning web.

Vansen. According to the kind of spider. The tall duke, now, has just the look of your garden spider; not the large-bellied kind, they are less dangerous; but your long-footed, meagre-bodied gentleman, that does not fatten on his diet, and whose threads are slender indeed, but not the less tenacious.

Jetter. Egmont is knight of the Golden Fleece, who dare lay hands on him? He can be tried only by his peers, by the assembled knights of his order. Your own foul tongue and evil conscience betray you into this nonsense.

Vansen. Think you that I wish him ill? I would you were in the right. He is an excellent gentleman. He once let off, with a sound drubbing, some good friends of mine, who would else have been hanged. Now take yourselves off! begone, I advise you! Yonder I see the patrol again commencing their round. They do not look as if they would be willing to fraternize with us over a glass. We must wait, and bide our time. I have a couple of nieces and a gossip of a tapster; if after enjoying themselves in their company, they are not tamed, they are regular

wolves.

Scene II.—The Palace of Eulenberg, Residence of the Duke of Alva

Silva and Gomez (meeting)

Silva. Have you executed the duke’s commands?

Gomez. Punctually. All the day-patrols have received orders to assemble at the appointed time, at the various points that I have indicated. Meanwhile, they march as usual through the town to maintain order. Each is ignorant respecting the movements of the rest, and imagines the command to have reference to himself alone; thus in a moment the cordon can be formed, and all the avenues to the palace occupied. Know you the reason of this command?

Silva. I am accustomed blindly to obey; and to whom can one more easily render obedience than to the duke, since the event always proves the wisdom of his commands?

Gomez. Well! Well! I am not surprised that you are become as reserved and monosyllabic as the duke, since you are obliged to be always about his person; to me, however, who am accustomed to the lighter service of Italy, it seems strange enough. In loyalty and obedience, I am the same old soldier as ever; but I am wont to indulge in gossip and discussion; here, you are all silent, and seem as though you knew not how to enjoy yourselves. The duke, methinks, is like a brazen tower without gates, the garrison of which must be furnished with wings. Not long ago I heard him say at the table of a gay, jovial fellow that he was like a bad spirit-shop, with a brandy sign displayed; to allure idlers, vagabonds, and thieves.

Silva. And has he not brought us hither in silence?

Gomez. Nothing can be said against that. Of a truth, we, who witnessed the address with which he led the troops hither out of Italy, have seen something. How he advanced warily through friends and foes; through the French, both royalists and heretics; through the Swiss and their confederates; maintained the strictest discipline, and accomplished with ease, and without the slightest hindrance, a march that was esteemed so perilous!—We have seen and learned

something.

Silva. Here too! Is not everything as still and quiet as though there had been no disturbance?

Gomez. Why, as for that, it was tolerably quiet when we arrived.

Silva. The provinces have become much more tranquil; if there is any movement now, it is only among those who wish to escape; and to them, methinks, the duke will speedily close every outlet.

Gomez. This service cannot fail to win for him the favour of the king.

Silva. And nothing is more expedient for us than to retain his. Should the king come hither, the duke doubtless and all whom he recommends will not go without their reward.

Gomez. Do you really believe then that the king will come?

Silva. So many preparations are being made, that the report appears highly probable.

Gomez. I am not convinced, however.

Silva. Keep your thoughts to yourself then. For if it should not be the king's intention to come, it is at least, certain that he wishes the rumour to be believed.

[Enter Ferdinand.

Ferdinand. Is my father not yet abroad?

Silva. We are waiting to receive his commands.

Ferdinand. The princes will soon be here.

Gomez. Are they expected to-day?

Ferdinand. Orange and Egmont.

Gomez (aside to Silva). A light breaks in upon me.

Silva. Well, then, say nothing about it.

Enter the Duke of Alva (as he advances the rest draw back)

Alva. Gomez.

Gomez (steps forward). My lord.

Alva. You have distributed the guards and given them their instructions?

Gomez. Most accurately. The day-patrols—

Alva. Enough. Attend in the gallery. Silva will announce to you the moment when you are to draw them together, and to occupy the avenues leading to the palace. The rest you know.

Gomez. I do, my lord.

[Exit. Alva. Silva.

Silva. Here my lord.

Alva. I shall require you to manifest to-day all the qualities which I have hitherto prized in you: courage, resolve, unswerving execution.

Silva. I thank you for affording me an opportunity of showing that your old servant is unchanged.

Alva. The moment the princes enter my cabinet, hasten to arrest Egmont's private Secretary. You have made all needful preparations for securing the others who are specified?

Silva. Rely upon us. Their doom, like a well-calculated eclipse, will overtake them with terrible certainty.

Alva. Have you had them all narrowly watched?

Silva. All. Egmont especially. He is the only one whose demeanour, since your arrival, remains unchanged. The live-long day he is now on one horse and now on another; he invites guests as usual, is merry and entertaining at table, plays at dice, shoots, and at night steals to his mistress. The others, on the contrary, have

made a manifest pause in their mode of life; they remain at home, and, from the outward aspect of their houses, you would imagine that there was a sick man within.

Alva. To work then, ere they recover in spite of us.

Silva. I shall bring them without fail. In obedience to your commands we load them with officious honours; they are alarmed; cautiously, yet anxiously, they tender us their thanks, feel that flight would be the most prudent course, yet none venture to adopt it; they hesitate, are unable to work together, while the bond which unites them prevents their acting boldly as individuals. They are anxious to withdraw themselves from suspicion, and thus only render themselves more obnoxious to it. I already contemplate with joy the successful realization of your scheme.

Alva. I rejoice only over what is accomplished, and not lightly over that; for there ever remains ground for serious and anxious thought. Fortune is capricious; the common, the worthless, she oft-times ennobles, while she dishonours with a contemptible issue the most maturely considered schemes. Await the arrival of the princes, then order Gomez to occupy the streets, and hasten yourself to arrest Egmont's secretary, and the others who are specified. This done, return, and announce to my son that he may bring me the tidings in the council.

Silva. I trust this evening I shall dare to appear in your presence. (Alva approaches his son who has hitherto been standing in the gallery.) I dare not whisper it even to myself; but my mind misgives me. The event will, I fear, be different from what he anticipates. I see before me spirits, who, still and thoughtful, weigh in ebon scales the doom of princes and of many thousands. Slowly the beam moves up and down; deeply the judges appear to ponder; at length one scale sinks, the other rises, breathed on by the caprice of destiny, and all is decided.

[Exit.

Alva (advancing with his son). How did you find the town?

Ferdinand. All is again quiet. I rode as for pastime, from street to street. Your well-distributed patrols hold Fear so tightly yoked, that she does not venture even to whisper. The town resembles a plain when the lightning's glare announces the impending storm: no bird, no beast is to be seen, that is not

stealing to a place of shelter.

Alva. Has nothing further occurred?

Ferdinand. Egmont, with a few companions, rode into the market-place; we exchanged greetings; he was mounted on an unbroken charger, which excited my admiration, “Let us hasten to break in our steeds,” he exclaimed; “we shall need them ere long!” He said that he should see me again to-day; he is coming here, at your desire, to deliberate with you.

Alva. He will see you again.

Ferdinand. Among all the knights whom I know here, he pleases me the best. I think we shall be friends.

Alva. You are always rash and inconsiderate. I recognize in you the levity of your Mother, which threw her unconditionally into my arms. Appearances have already allured you precipitately into many dangerous connections.

Ferdinand. You will find me ever submissive.

Alva. I pardon this inconsiderate kindness, this heedless gaiety, in consideration of your youthful blood. Only forget not on what mission I am sent, and what part in it I would assign to you.

Ferdinand. Admonish me, and spare me not, when you deem it needful.

Alva (after a pause). My son!

Ferdinand. My father!

Alva. The princes will be here anon; Orange and Egmont. It is not mistrust that has withheld me till now from disclosing to you what is about to take place. They will not depart hence.

Ferdinand. What do you purpose?

Alva. It has been resolved to arrest them.—You are astonished! Learn what you have to do; the reasons you shall know when all is accomplished. Time fails now to unfold them. With you alone I wish to deliberate on the weightiest, the most

secret matters; a powerful bond holds us linked together; you are dear and precious to me; on you I would bestow everything. Not the habit of obedience alone would I impress upon you; I desire also to implant within your mind the power to realize, to command, to execute; to you I would bequeath a vast inheritance, to the king a most useful servant; I would endow you with the noblest of my possessions, that you may not be ashamed to appear among your brethren.

Ferdinand. How deeply am I indebted to you for this love, which you manifest for me alone, while a whole kingdom trembles before you!

Alva. Now hear what is to be done. As soon as the princes have entered, every avenue to the palace will be guarded. This duty is confided to Gomez. Silva will hasten to arrest Egmont's secretary, together with those whom we hold most in suspicion. You, meanwhile, will take the command of the guards stationed at the gates and in the courts. Before all, take care to occupy the adjoining apartment with the trustiest soldiers. Wait in the gallery till Silva returns, then bring me any unimportant paper, as a signal that his commission is executed. Remain in the ante-chamber till Orange retires, follow him; I will detain Egmont here as though I had some further communication to make to him. At the end of the gallery demand Orange's sword, summon the guards, secure promptly the most dangerous man; I meanwhile will seize Egmont here.

Ferdinand. I obey, my father—for the first time with a heavy and an anxious heart.

Alva. I pardon you; this is the first great day of your life.

[Enter Silva.

Silva. A courier from Antwerp. Here is Orange's letter. He does not come.

Alva. Says the messenger so?

Silva. No, my own heart tells me.

Alva. In thee speaks my evil genius. (After reading the letter, he makes a sign to the two, and they retire to the gallery. Alva remains alone in front of the stage.) He comes not! Till the last moment he delays declaring himself. He ventures not to come! So then, the cautious man, contrary to all expectations, is for once

cautious enough to lay aside his wonted caution. The hour moves on! Let the finger travel but a short space over the dial, and a great work is done or lost—irrevocably lost; for the opportunity can never be retrieved, nor can our intention remain concealed. Long had I maturely weighed everything, foreseen even this contingency, and firmly resolved in my own mind what, in that case, was to be done; and now, when I am called upon to act, I can with difficulty guard my mind from being again distracted by conflicting doubts. Is it expedient to seize the others if he escape me? Shall I delay, and suffer Egmont to elude my grasp, together with his friends, and so many others who now, and perhaps for to-day only, are in my hands? How! Does destiny control even thee—the uncontrollable? How long matured! How well prepared! How great, how admirable the plan! How nearly had hope attained the goal! And now, at the decisive moment, thou art placed between two evils; as in a lottery, thou dost grasp in the dark future; what thou hast drawn remains still unrolled, to thee unknown whether it is a prize or a blank! (He becomes attentive, like one who hears a noise, and steps to the window.) ‘Tis he! Egmont! Did thy steed bear thee hither so lightly, and started not at the scent of blood, at the spirit with the naked sword who received thee at the gate? Dismount! Lo, now thou hast one foot in the grave! And now both! Ay, caress him, and for the last time stroke his neck for the gallant service he has rendered thee. And for me no choice is left. The delusion, in which Egmont ventures here to-day, cannot a second time deliver him into my hands! Hark! (Ferdinand and Silva enter hastily.) Obey my orders! I swerve not from my purpose.! shall detain Egmont here as best I may, till you bring me tidings from Silva. Then remain at hand. Thee, too, fate has robbed of the proud honour of arresting with thine own hand the king’s greatest enemy. (To Silva.) Be prompt! (To Ferdinand.) Advance to meet him.

(Alva remains some moments alone, pacing the chamber in silence.)

[Enter Egmont.

Egmont. I come to learn the king’s commands; to hear what service he demands from our loyalty, which remains eternally devoted to him.

Alva. He desires, before all, to hear your counsel.

Egmont. Upon what subject? Does Orange come also? I thought to find him here.

Alva. I regret that he fails us at this important crisis. The king desires your counsel, your opinion as to the best means of tranquillizing these states. He trusts indeed that you will zealously co-operate with him in quelling these disturbances, and in securing to these provinces the benefit of complete and permanent order.

Egmont. You, my lord, should know better than I, that tranquillity is already sufficiently restored, and was still more so, till the appearance of fresh troops again agitated the public mind, and filled it anew with anxiety and alarm.

Alva. You seem to intimate that it would have been more advisable if the king had not placed me in a position to interrogate you.

Egmont. Pardon me! It is not for me to determine whether the king acted advisedly in sending the army hither, whether the might of his royal presence alone would not have operated more powerfully. The army is here, the king is not. But we should be most ungrateful were we to forget what we owe to the Regent. Let it be acknowledged! By her prudence and valour, by her judicious use of authority and force, of persuasion and finesse, she pacified the insurgents, and, to the astonishment of the world, succeeded, in the course of a few months, in bringing a rebellious people back to their duty.

Alva. I deny it not. The insurrection is quelled; and the people appear to be already forced back within the bounds of obedience. But does it not depend upon their caprice alone to overstep these bounds? Who shall prevent them from again breaking loose? Where is the power capable of restraining them? Who will be answerable to us for their future loyalty and submission? Their own goodwill is the sole pledge we have.

Egmont. And is not the goodwill of a people the surest, the noblest pledge? By heaven! when can a monarch hold himself more secure, ay, both against foreign and domestic foes, than when all can stand for one, and one for all?

Alva. You would not have us believe, however, that such is the case here at present?

Egmont. Let the king proclaim a general pardon; he will thus tranquillize the public mind; and it will be seen how speedily loyalty and affection will return, when confidence is restored.

Alva. How! And suffer those who have insulted the majesty of the king, who have violated the sanctuaries of our religion, to go abroad unchallenged! living witnesses that enormous crimes may be perpetrated with impunity!

Egmont. And ought not a crime of frenzy, of intoxication, to be excused, rather than horribly chastised? Especially when there is the sure hope, nay, more, where there is positive certainty that the evil will never again recur? Would not sovereigns thus be more secure? Are not those monarchs most extolled by the world and by posterity, who can pardon, pity, despise an offence against their dignity? Are they not on that account likened to God himself, who is far too exalted to be assailed by every idle blasphemy?

Alva. And therefore, should the king contend for the honour of God and of religion, we for the authority of the king. What the supreme power disdains to avert, it is our duty to avenge. Were I to counsel, no guilty person should live to rejoice in his impunity.

Egmont. Think you that you will be able to reach them all? Do we not daily hear that fear is driving them to and fro, and forcing them out of the land? The more wealthy will escape to other countries with their property, their children, and their friends; while the poor will carry their industrious hands to our neighbours.

Alva. They will, if they cannot be prevented. It is on this account that the king desires counsel and aid from every prince, zealous co-operation from every stadtholder; not merely a description of the present posture of affairs, or conjectures as to what might take place were events suffered to hold on their course without interruption. To contemplate a mighty evil, to flatter oneself with hope, to trust to time, to strike a blow, like the clown in a play, so as to make a noise and appear to do something, when in fact one would fain do nothing; is not such conduct calculated to awaken a suspicion that those who act thus contemplate with satisfaction a rebellion, which they would not indeed excite, but which they are by no means unwilling to encourage?

Egmont (about to break forth, restrains himself, and after a brief pause, speaks with composure). Not every design is obvious, and many a man’s design is misconstrued. It is widely rumoured, however, that the object which the king has in view is not so much to govern the provinces according to uniform and dearly defined laws, to maintain the majesty of religion, and to give his people universal peace, as unconditionally to subjugate them, to rob them of their

ancient rights, to appropriate their possessions, to curtail the fair privileges of the nobles, for whose sake alone they are ready to serve him with life and limb. Religion, it is said, is merely a splendid device, behind which every dangerous design may be contrived with the greater ease; the prostrate crowds adore the sacred symbols pictured there, while behind lurks the fowler ready to ensnare them.

Alva. This must I hear from you?

Egmont. I speak not my own sentiments! I but repeat what is loudly rumoured, and uttered now here and now there by great and by humble, by wise men and fools. The Netherlanders fear a double yoke, and who will be surety to them for their liberty?

Alva. Liberty! A fair word when rightly understood. What liberty would they have? What is the freedom of the most free? To do right! And in that the monarch will not hinder them. No! No! They imagine themselves enslaved, when they have not the power to injure themselves and others. Would it not be better to abdicate at once, rather than rule such a people? When the country is threatened by foreign invaders, the burghers, occupied only with their immediate interests, bestow no thought upon the advancing foe, and when the king requires their aid, they quarrel among themselves, and thus, as it were, conspire with the enemy. Far better is it to circumscribe their power, to control and guide them for their good, as children are controlled and guided. Trust me, a people grows neither old nor wise, a people remains always in its infancy.

Egmont. How rarely does a king attain wisdom! And is it not fit that the many should confide their interests to the many rather than to the one? And not even to the one, but to the few servants of the one, men who have grown old under the eyes of their master. To grow wise, it seems, is the exclusive privilege of these favoured individuals.

Alva. Perhaps for the very reason that they are not left to themselves.

Egmont. And therefore they would fain leave no one else to his own guidance. Let them do what they like, however; I have replied to your questions, and I repeat, the measures you propose will never succeed! They cannot succeed! I know my countrymen. They are men worthy to tread God’s earth; each complete in himself, a little king, steadfast, active, capable, loyal, attached to ancient

customs. It may be difficult to win their confidence, but it is easy to retain it. Firm and unbending! They may be crushed, but not subdued.

Alva (who during this speech has looked round several times). Would you venture to repeat what you have uttered, in the king's presence?

Egmont. It were the worse, if in his presence I were restrained by fear! The better for him and for his people, if he inspired me with confidence, if he encouraged me to give yet freer utterance to my thoughts.

Alva. What is profitable, I can listen to as well as he.

Egmont. I would say to him—'Tis easy for the shepherd to drive before him a flock of sheep; the ox draws the plough without opposition; but if you would ride the noble steed, you must study his thoughts, you must require nothing unreasonable, nor unreasonably, from him. The burgher desires to retain his ancient constitution; to be governed by his own countrymen; and why? Because he knows in that case how he shall be ruled, because he can rely upon their disinterestedness, upon their sympathy with his fate.

Alva. And ought not the Regent to be empowered to alter these ancient usages? Should not this constitute his fairest privilege? What is permanent in this world? And shall the constitution of a state alone remain unchanged? Must not every relation alter in the course of time, and on that very account, an ancient constitution become the source of a thousand evils, because not adapted to the present condition of the people? These ancient rights afford, doubtless, convenient loopholes, through which the crafty and the powerful may creep, and wherein they may lie concealed, to the injury of the people and of the entire community; and it is on this account, I fear, that they are held in such high esteem.

Egmont. And these arbitrary changes, these unlimited encroachments of the supreme power, are they not indications that one will permit himself to do what is forbidden to thousands? The monarch would alone be free, that he may have it in his power to gratify his every wish, to realize his every thought. And though we should confide in him as a good and virtuous sovereign, will he be answerable to us for his successor? That none who come after him shall rule without consideration, without forbearance! And who would deliver us from absolute caprice, should he send hither his servants, his minions, who, without

knowledge of the country and its requirements, should govern according to their own good pleasure, meet with no opposition, and know themselves exempt from all responsibility?

Alva (who has meanwhile again looked round). There is nothing more natural than that a king should choose to retain the power in his own hands, and that he should select as the instruments of his authority, those who best understand him, who desire to understand him, and who will unconditionally execute his will.

Egmont. And just as natural is it, that the burgher should prefer being governed by one born and reared in the same land, whose notions of right and wrong are in harmony with his own, and whom he can regard as his brother.

Alva. And yet the noble, methinks, has shared rather unequally with these brethren of his.

Egmont. That took place centuries ago, and is now submitted to without envy. But should new men, whose presence is not needed in the country, be sent, to enrich themselves a second time, at the cost of the nation; should the people see themselves exposed to their bold, unscrupulous rapacity, it would excite a ferment that would not soon be quelled.

Alva. You utter words to which I ought not to listen;—I, too, am a foreigner.

Egmont. That they are spoken in your presence is a sufficient proof that they have no reference to you.

Alva. Be that as it may, I would rather not hear them from you. The king sent me here in the hope that I should obtain the support of the nobles. The king wills, and will have his will obeyed. After profound deliberation, the king at length discerns what course will best promote the welfare of the people; matters cannot be permitted to go on as heretofore; it is the king’s intention to limit their power for their own good; if necessary, to force upon them their salvation: to sacrifice the more dangerous burghers in order that the rest may find repose, and enjoy in peace the blessing of a wise government, This is his resolve; this I am commissioned to announce to the nobles; and in his name I require from them advice, not as to the course to be pursued—on that he is resolved—but as to the best means of carrying his purpose into effect.

Egmont. Your words, alas, justify the fears of the people, the universal fear! The

king has then resolved as no sovereign ought to resolve. In order to govern his subjects more easily, he would crush, subvert, nay, ruthlessly destroy, their strength, their spirit, and their self-respect! He would violate the inmost core of their individuality, doubtless with the view of promoting their happiness. He would annihilate them, that they may assume a new, a different form. Oh! if his purpose be good, he is fatally misguided! It is not the king whom we resist;—we but place ourselves in the way of the monarch, who, unhappily, is about to take the first rash step in a wrong direction.

Alva. Such being your sentiments, it were a vain attempt for us to endeavour to agree. You must indeed think poorly of the king, and contemptibly of his counsellors, if you imagine that everything has not already been thought of and maturely weighed. I have no commission a second time to balance conflicting arguments. From the people I demand submission;—and from you, their leaders and princes, I demand counsel and support, as pledges of this unconditional duty.

Egmont. Demand our heads, and your object Is attained; to a noble soul it must be indifferent whether he stoop his neck to such a yoke, or lay it upon the block. I have spoken much to little purpose. I have agitated the air, but accomplished nothing.

[Enter Ferdinand.

Ferdinand. Pardon my intrusion. Here is a letter, the bearer of which urgently demands an answer.

Alva. Allow me to peruse its contents. (Steps aside.)

Ferdinand (to Egmont). ‘Tis a noble steed that your people have brought, to carry you away.

Egmont. I have seen worse. I have had him some time; I think of parting with him. If he pleases you we shall probably soon agree as to the price.

Ferdinand. We will think about it.

(Alva motions to his son, who retires to the background.)

Egmont. Farewell! Allow me to retire; for, by heaven, I know not what more I can say.

Alva. Fortunately for you, chance prevents you from making a fuller disclosure of your sentiments. You incautiously lay bare the recesses of your heart, and your own lips furnish evidence against you, more fatal than could be produced by your bitterest adversary.

Ferdinand. This reproach disturbs me not. I know my own heart; I know with what honest zeal I am devoted to the king; I know that my allegiance is more true than that of many who, in his service, seek only to serve themselves. I regret that our discussion should terminate so unsatisfactorily, and trust that in spite of our opposing views, the service of the king, our master, and the welfare of our country, may speedily unite us; another conference, the presence of the princes who to-day are absent, may, perchance, in a more propitious moment, accomplish what at present appears impossible. In this hope I take my leave.

Alva (who at the same time makes a sign to Ferdinand). Hold, Egmont!— Your sword!- (The centre door opens and discloses the gallery, which is occupied with guards, who remain motionless.)

Egmont (after a pause of astonishment). This was the intention? For this thou hast summoned me? (Grasping his sword as if to defend himself.) Am I then weaponless?

Alva. The king commands. Thou art my prisoner. (At the same time guards enter from both sides.)

Egmont (after a pause). The king?—Orange! Orange! (after a pause, resigning his sword). Take it! It has been employed far oftener in defending the cause of my king than in protecting this breast.

(He retires by the centre door, followed by the guard and Alva’s son. Alva remains standing while the curtain falls.)

ACT V

Scene I.—A Street. Twilight

Clara, Brackenburg, Burghers

Brackenburg. Dearest, for Heaven’s sake, what wouldst thou do?

Clara. Come with me, Brackenburg! Thou canst not know the people, we are certain to rescue him; for what can equal their love for him? Each feels, I could swear it, the burning desire to deliver him, to avert danger from a life so precious, and to restore freedom to the most free. Come! A voice only is wanting to call them together. In their souls the memory is still fresh of all they owe him, and well they know that his mighty arm alone shields them from destruction. For his sake, for their own sake, they must peril everything. And what do we peril? At most, our lives, which if he perish, are not worth preserving.

Brackenburg. Unhappy girl! Thou seest not the power that holds us fettered as with bands of iron.

Clara. To me it does not appear invincible. Let us not lose time in idle words. Here comes some of our old, honest, valiant burghers! Hark ye, friends! Neighbours! Hark! —Say, how fares it with Egmont?

Carpenter. What does the girl want? Tell her to hold her peace.

Clara. Step nearer, that we may speak low, till we are united and more strong. Not a moment is to be lost! Audacious tyranny, that dared to fetter him, already lifts the dagger against his life. Oh, my friends! With the advancing twilight my anxiety grows more intense. I dread this night. Come! Let us disperse; let us hasten from quarter to quarter, and call out the burghers. Let every one grasp his ancient weapons. In the market-place we meet again, and every one will be carried onward by our gathering stream. The enemy will see themselves surrounded, overwhelmed, and be compelled to yield. How can a handful of slaves resist us? And he will return among us, he will see himself rescued, and can for once thank us, us, who are already so deeply in his debt. He will behold, perchance, ay doubtless, he will again behold the morn’s red dawn in the free heavens.

Carpenter. What ails thee, maiden?

Clara. Can ye misunderstand me? I speak of the Count! I speak of Egmont.

Jetter. Speak not the name! ‘tis deadly.

Clara. Not speak his name? How? Not Egmont’s name? Is it not on every tongue? Where stands it not inscribed? Often have I read it emblazoned with all its letters among these stars. Not utter it? What mean ye? Friends! good, kind neighbours, ye are dreaming; collect yourselves. Gaze not upon me with those fixed and anxious looks! Cast not such timid glances on every side! I but give utterance to the wish of all. Is not my voice the voice of your own hearts? Who, in this fearful night, ere he seeks his restless couch, but on bended knee will, in earnest prayer, seek to wrest his life as a cherished boon from heaven? Ask each other! Let each ask his own heart! And who but exclaims with me,—“Egmont’s liberty, or death!”

Jetter. God help us! This is a sad business.

Clara. Stay! Stay! Shrink not away at the sound of his name, to meet whom ye were wont to press forward so joyously!—When rumour announced his approach, when the cry arose, “Egmont comes! He comes from Ghent!”—then happy indeed were those citizens who dwelt in the streets through which he was to pass. And when the neighing of his steed was heard, did not every one throw aside his work, while a ray of hope and joy, like a sunbeam from his countenance, stole over the toil-worn faces that peered from every window. Then, as ye stood in the doorways, ye would lift up your children in your arms, and pointing to him, exclaim: “See, that is Egmont, he who towers above the rest! ‘Tis from bird that ye must look for better times than those your poor fathers have known.” Let not your children inquire at some future day, “Where is he? Where are the better times ye promised us?”—Thus we waste the time in idle words! do nothing,—betray him.

Soest. Shame on thee, Brackenburg! Let her not run on thus! Prevent the mischief!

Brackenburg. Dear Clara! Let us go! What will your Mother say? Perchance—

Clara. Thinkest thou I am a child, or frantic? What avails perchance?— With no vain hope canst thou hide from me this dreadful certainty … Ye shall hear me

and ye will: for I see it, ye are overwhelmed, ye cannot hearken to the voice of your own hearts. Through the present peril cast but one glance into the past,—the recent past. Send your thoughts forward into the future. Could ye live, would ye live, were he to perish? With him expires the last breath of freedom. What was he not to you? For whose sake did he expose himself to the direst perils? His blood flowed, his wounds were healed for you alone. The mighty spirit, that upheld you all, a dungeon now confines, while the horrors of secret murder are hovering around. Perhaps he thinks of you—perhaps he hopes in you,—he who has been accustomed only to grant favours to others and to fulfil their prayers.

Carpenter. Come, gossip.

Clara. I have neither the arms, nor the vigour of a man; but I have that which ye all lack—courage and contempt of danger. O that my breath could kindle your souls! That, pressing you to this bosom, I could arouse and animate you! Come! I will march in your midst!—As a waving banner, though weaponless, leads on a gallant army of warriors, so shall my spirit hover, like a flame, over your ranks, while love and courage shall unite the dispersed and wavering multitude into a terrible host.

Jetter. Take her away; I pity her, poor thing!

[Exeunt Burgers.

Brackenburg. Clara! Seest thou not where we are?

Clara. Where? Under the dome of heaven, which has so often seemed to arch itself more gloriously as the noble Egmont passed beneath it. From these windows I have seen them look forth, four or five heads one above the other; at these doors the cowards have stood, bowing and scraping, if he but chanced to look down upon them! Oh, how dear they were to me, when they honoured him. Had he been a tyrant they might have turned with indifference from his fall l But they loved him! O ye hands, so prompt to wave caps in his honour, can ye not grasp a sword? Brackenburg, and we? —do we chide them? These arms that have so often embraced him, what do they for him now? Stratagem has accomplished so much in the world. Thou knowest the ancient castle, every passage, every secret way.—Nothing is impossible,—suggest some plan—

Brackenburg. That we might go home!

Clara. Well.

Brackenburg. There at the corner I see Alva's guard; let the voice of reason penetrate to thy heart! Dost thou deem me a coward? Dost thou doubt that for thy sake I would peril my life? Here we are both mad, I as well as thou. Dost thou not perceive that thy scheme is impracticable? Oh, be calm! Thou art beside thyself.

Clara. Beside myself! Horrible. You, Brackenburg, are beside yourself. When you hailed the hero with loud acclaim, called him your friend, your hope, your refuge, shouted vivats as he passed;—then I stood in my corner, half opened the window, concealed myself while I listened, and my heart beat higher than yours who greeted him so loudly. Now it again beats higher! In the hour of peril you conceal yourselves, deny him, and feel not, that if he perish, you are lost.

Brackenburg. Come home.

Clara. Home?

Brackenburg. Recollect thyself! Look around thee! These are the streets in which thou weft wont to appear only on the Sabbath-day, when thou didst walk modestly to church; where, over-decorous perhaps, thou wert displeased if I but joined thee with a kindly greeting. And now thou dost stand, speak, and act before the eyes of the whole world. Recollect thyself, love! How can this avail us?

Clara. Home! Yes, I remember. Come, Brackenburg, let us go home! Knowest thou where my home lies?

[Exeunt.

Scene II.—A Prison

Lighted by a lamp, a couch in the background

Egmont (alone). Old friend! Ever faithful sleep, dost thou too forsake me, like my other friends? How wert thou wont of yore to descend unsought upon my free brow, cooling my temples as with a myrtle wreath of love! Amidst the din of

battle, on the waves of life, I rested in thine arms, breathing lightly as a growing boy. When tempests whistled through the leaves and boughs, when the summits of the lofty trees swung creaking in the blast, the inmost core of my heart remained unmoved. What agitates thee now? What shakes thy firm and steadfast mind? I feel it, ‘tis the sound of the murderous axe, gnawing at thy root. Yet I stand erect, but an inward shudder runs through my frame. Yes, it prevails, this treacherous power; it undermines the firm, the lofty stem, and ere the bark withers, thy verdant crown falls crashing to the earth.

Yet wherefore now, thou who hast so often chased the weightiest cares like bubbles from thy brow, wherefore canst thou not dissipate this dire foreboding which incessantly haunts thee in a thousand different shapes? Since when hast thou trembled at the approach of death, amid whose varying forms, thou weft wont calmly to dwell, as with the other shapes of this familiar earth. But ‘tis not he, the sudden foe, to encounter whom the sound bosom emulously pants;–‘tis the dungeon, emblem of the grave, revolting alike to the hero and the coward. How intolerable I used to feel it, in the stately hall, girt round by gloomy walls, when, seated on my cushioned chair, in the solemn assembly of the princes, questions, which scarcely required deliberation, were overlaid with endless discussions, while the rafters of the ceiling seemed to stifle and oppress me. Then I would hurry forth as soon as possible, fling myself upon my horse with deep-drawn breath, and away to the wide champaign, man’s natural element, where, exhaling from the earth, nature’s richest treasures are poured forth around us, while, from the wide heavens, the stars shed down their blessings through the still air; where, like earth-born giants, we spring aloft, invigorated by our Mother’s touch; where our entire humanity and our human desires throb in every vein; where the desire to press forward, to vanquish, to snatch, to use his clenched fist, to possess, to conquer, glows through the soul of the young hunter; where the warrior, with rapid stride, assumes his inborn right to dominion over the world; and, with terrible liberty, sweeps like a desolating hailstorm over the field and grove, knowing no boundaries traced by the hand of man.

Thou art but a shadow, a dream of the happiness I so long possessed; where has treacherous fate conducted thee? Did she deny thee to meet the rapid stroke of never-shunned death, in the open face of day, only to prepare for thee a foretaste of the grave, in the midst of this loathsome corruption? How revolting its rank odour exhales from these damp stones! Life stagnates, and my foot shrinks from the couch as from the grave. Oh care, care! Thou who dost begin prematurely the work of murder,— forbear;—Since when has Egmont been alone, so utterly

alone in the world? ‘Tis doubt renders thee insensible, not happiness. The justice of the king, in which through life thou hast confided, the friendship of the Regent, which, thou mayst confess it, was akin to love,—have these suddenly vanished, like a meteor of the night, and left thee alone upon thy gloomy path? Will not Orange, at the head of thy friends, contrive some daring scheme? Will not the people assemble, and with gathering might, attempt the rescue of their faithful friend?

Ye walls, which thus gird me round, separate me not from the well-intentioned zeal of so many kindly souls. And may the courage with which my glance was wont to inspire them, now return again from their hearts to mine. Yes! they assemble in thousands! they come! they stand beside me! their pious wish rises urgently to heaven, and implores a miracle; and if no angel stoops for my deliverance, I see them grasp eagerly their lance and sword. The gates are forced, the bolts are riven, the walls fall beneath their conquering hands, and Egmont advances joyously, to hail the freedom of the rising morn. How many well-known faces receive me with loud acclaim! O Clara! wert thou a man, I should see thee here the very first, and thank thee for that which it is galling to owe even to a king—liberty.

Scene III.—Clara’s House

Clara (enters from her chamber with a lamp and a glass of water; she places the glass upon the table and steps to the window).

Brackenburg, is it you? What noise was that? No one yet? No one! I will set the lamp in the window, that he may see that I am still awake, that I still watch for him. He promised me tidings. Tidings? horrible certainty!— Egmont condemned!—what tribunal has the right to summon him?—And they dare to condemn him!—Does the king condemn him, or the duke? And the Regent withdraws herself! Orange hesitates, and all his friends! — Is this the world, of whose fickleness and treachery I have heard so much, and as yet experienced nothing? Is this the world?—Who could be so base as to hear malice against one so dear? Could villainy itself be audacious enough to overwhelm with sudden destruction the object of a nation’s homage? Yet so it is—it is-O Egmont, I held thee safe before God and man, safe as in my arms! What was I to thee. Thou hast called me thine, my whole being was devoted to thee. What am I now? In vain I stretch out my hand to the toils that environ thee. Thou helpless and I free!—Here is the key that unlocks my chamber door. My going out and my coming in,

depend upon my own caprice; yet, alas; to aid thee I am powerless!—Oh, bind me that I may not despair; hurl me into the deepest dungeon, that I may dash my head against the damp walls, groan for freedom, and dream how I would rescue him if fetters did not hold me bound.—Now I am free, and in freedom lies the anguish of impotence.—Conscious of my own existence, yet unable to stir a limb in his behalf, alas! even this insignificant portion of thy being, thy Clara, is, like thee, a captive, and, separated from thee, consumes her expiring energies in the agonies of death.—I hear a stealthy step,—a cough—Brackenburg,—'tis he! —Kind, unhappy man, thy destiny remains ever the same; thy love opens to thee the door at night, alas! to what a doleful meeting.

(Enter Brackenburg.) Thou com'st so pale, so terrified! Brackenburg! What is it?

Brackenburg. I have sought thee through perils and circuitous paths. The principal streets are occupied with troops;—through lanes and by-ways have I stolen to thee!

Clara. Tell me, how is it?

Brackenburg (seating himself). O Clara, let me weep. I loved him not. He was the rich man who lured to better a pasture the poor man's solitary lamb. I have never cursed him, God has created me with a true and tender heart. My life was consumed in anguish, and each day I hoped would end my misery.

Clara. Let that be forgotten, Brackenburg! Forget thyself. Speak to me of him! Is it true? Is he condemned?

Brackenburg. He is! I know it.

Clara. And still lives?

Brackenburg. Yes, he still lives.

Clara. How canst thou be sure of that? Tyranny murders the hero in the night! His blood flows concealed from every eye. The people stunned and bewildered, lie buried in sleep, dream of deliverance, dream of the fulfilment of their impotent wishes, while, indignant at our supineness, his spirit abandons the world. He is no more! Deceive me not; deceive not thyself!

Brackenburg. No,—he lives! and the Spaniards, alas, are preparing for the

people, on whom they are about to trample, a terrible spectacle, in order to crush for ever, by a violent blow, each heart that yet pants for freedom.

Clara. Proceed! Calmly pronounce my death-warrant also! Near and more near I approach that blessed land, and already from those realms of peace, I feel the breath of consolation say on.

Brackenburg. From casual words, dropped here and there by the guards, I learned that secretly in the market-place they were preparing some terrible spectacle. Through by-ways and familiar lanes I stole to my cousin's house, and from a back window, looked out upon the market-place. Torches waved to and fro, in the hands of a wide circle of Spanish soldiers. I sharpened my unaccustomed sight, and out of the darkness there arose before me a scaffold, black, spacious, and lofty! The sight filled me with horror. Several persons were employed in covering with black cloth such portions of the wood-work as yet remained white and visible. The steps were covered last, also with black;—I saw it all. They seemed preparing for the celebration of some horrible sacrifice. A white crucifix, that shone like silver through the night, was raised on one side. As I gazed the terrible conviction strengthened in my mind. Scattered torches still gleamed here and there; gradually they flickered and went out. Suddenly the hideous birth of night returned into its Mother's womb.

Clara. Hush, Brackenburg! Be still! Let this veil rest upon my soul. The spectres are vanished; and thou, gentle night, lend thy mantle to the inwardly fermenting earth, she will no longer endure the loathsome burden, shuddering, she rends open her yawning chasms, and with a crash swallows the murderous scaffold. And that God, whom in their rage they have insulted, sends down His angel from on high; at the hallowed touch of the messenger bolts and bars fly back; he pours around our friend a mild radiance, and leads him gently through the night to liberty. My path leads also through the darkness to meet him.

Brackenburg (detaining her). My child, whither wouldst thou go? What wouldst thou do?

Clara. Softly, my friend, lest some one should awake! Lest we should awake ourselves! Know'st thou this phial, Brackenburg? I took it from thee once in jest, when thou, as was thy wont, didst threaten, in thy impatience, to end thy days.—And now my friend—

Brackenburg. In the name of all the saints!

Clara. Thou canst not hinder me. Death is my portion! Grudge me not the quiet and easy death which thou hadst prepared for thyself. Give me thine hand!—At the moment when I unclose that dismal portal through which there is no return, I may tell thee, with this pressure of the hand, how sincerely I have loved, how deeply I have pitied thee. My brother died young; I chose thee to fill his place; thy heart rebelled, thou didst torment thyself and me, demanding with ever increasing fervour that which fate had not destined for thee. Forgive me and farewell! Let me call thee brother! ‘Tis a name that embraces many names. Receive, with a true heart, the last fair token of the departing spirit —take this kiss. Death unites all, Brackenburg—us too it will unite!

Brackenburg. Let me then die with thee! Share it! oh, share it! There is enough to extinguish two lives.

Clara. Hold! Thou must live, thou canst live.—Support my Mother, who, without thee, would be a prey to want. Be to her what I can no longer be, live together, and weep for me. Weep for our fatherland, and for him who could alone have upheld it. The present generation must still endure this bitter woe; vengeance itself could not obliterate it. Poor souls, live on, through this gap in time, which is time no longer. To-day the world suddenly stands still, its course is arrested, and my pulse will beat but for a few minutes longer. Farewell.

Brackenburg. Oh, live with us, as we live only for thy sake! In taking thine own life, thou wilt take ours also; still live and suffer. We will stand by thee, nothing shall sever us from thy side, and love, with ever-watchful solicitude, shall prepare for thee the sweetest consolation in its loving arms. Be ours! Ours! I dare not say, mine.

Clara. Hush, Brackenburg! Thou feelest not what chord thou touchest. Where hope appears to thee, I see only despair.

Brackenburg. Share hope with the living! Pause on the brink of the precipice, cast one glance into the gulf below, and then look back on us.

Clara. I have conquered; call me not back to the struggle.

Brackenburg. Thou art stunned; enveloped in night, thou seekest the abyss. Every light is not yet extinguished, yet many days!—

Clara. Alas! Alas! Cruelly thou dost rend the veil from before mine eyes. Yes, the day will dawn! Despite its misty shroud it needs must dawn. Timidly the burgher razes from his window, night leaves behind an ebon speck; he looks, and the scaffold looms fearfully in the morning light. With re-awakened anguish the desecrated image of the Saviour lifts to the Father its imploring eyes. The sun veils his beams, he will not mark the hero's death-hour. Slowly the fingers go their round—one hour strikes after another—hold! Now is the time. The thought of the morning scares me into the grave.

(She goes to the window as if to look out, and drinks secretly.)

Brackenburg. Clara! Clara!

Clara (goes to the table, and drinks water). Here is the remainder. I invite thee not to follow me. Do as thou wilt; farewell. Extinguish this lamp silently and without delay; I am going to rest. Steal quietly away, close the door after thee. Be still! Wake not my Mother! Go, save thyself, if thou wouldst not be taken for my murderer. [Exit.

Brackenburg. She leaves me for the last time as she has ever done. What human soul could conceive how cruelly she lacerates the heart that loves her? She leaves me to myself, leaves me to choose between life and death, and both are alike hateful to me. To die alone! Weep, ye tender souls! Fate has no sadder doom than mine. She shares with me the death-potion, yet sends me from her side! She draws me after her, yet thrusts me back into life! Oh, Egmont, how enviable a lot falls to thee! She goes before thee! The crown of victory from her hand is thine, she brings all heaven to meet thee!—And shall I follow? Again to stand aloof? To carry this inextinguishable jealousy even to yon distant realms? Earth is no longer a tarrying place for me, and hell and heaven offer equal torture. Now welcome to the wretched the dread hand of annihilation!

[Exit. (The scene remains some time unchanged. Music sounds, indicating Clara's death; the lamp, which Brackenburg had forgotten to extinguish, flares up once or twice, and then suddenly expires. The scene changes to .

Scene IV.—A Prison

Egmont is discovered sleeping on a couch. A rustling of keys is heard; the door

opens; servants enter with torches; Ferdinand and Silva follow, accompanied by soldiers. Egmont starts from his sleep.

Egmont. Who are ye that thus rudely banish slumber from my eyes? What mean these vague and insolent glances? Why this fearful procession? With what dream of horror come ye to delude my half awakened soul?

Silva. The duke sends us to announce your sentence.

Egmont. Do ye also bring the headsman who is to execute it?

Silva. Listen, and you will know the doom that awaits you.

Egmont. It is in keeping with the rest of your infamous proceedings. Hatched in night and in night achieved, so would this audacious act of injustice shroud itself from observation!—Step boldly forth, thou who dost bear the sword concealed beneath thy mantle; here is my head, the freest ever severed by tyranny from the trunk.

Silva. You err! The righteous judges who have condemned you will not conceal their sentence from the light of day.

Egmont. Then does their audacity exceed all imagination and belief. Silva (takes the sentence from an attendant, unfolds it, and reads). “In the King’s name, and invested by his Majesty with authority to judge all his subjects of whatever rank, not excepting the knights of the Golden Fleece, we declare–”

Egmont. Can the king transfer that authority?

Silva. “We declare, after a strict and legal investigation, thee, Henry, Count Egmont, Prince of Gaure, guilty of high treason, and pronounce thy sentence:—That at early dawn thou be led from this prison to the market-place, and that there, in sight of the people, and as a warning to all traitors, thou with the sword be brought from life to death. Given at Brussels.” (Date and year so indistinctly read as to be imperfectly heard by the audience.) “Ferdinand, Duke of Alva, President of the Tribunal of Twelve.” Thou knowest now thy doom. Brief time remains for thee to prepare for the impending stroke, to arrange thy affairs, and to take leave of thy friends.

[Exit Silva with followers. Ferdinand remains with two torch-bearers. The stage

is dimly lighted.

Egmont (stands for a time as if buried in thought, and allows Silva to retire without looking round. He imagines himself alone, and, on raising his eyes, beholds Alva’s son).

Thou tarriest here? Wouldst thou by thy presence augment my amazement, my horror? Wouldst thou carry to thy father the welcome tidings that in unmanly fashion I despair? Go. Tell him that he deceives neither the world nor me. At first it will be whispered cautiously behind his back, then spoken more and more loudly, and when at some future day the ambitious man descends from his proud eminence, a thousand voices will proclaim—that ‘twas not the welfare of the state, not the honour of the king, not the tranquillity of the provinces, that brought him hither. For his own selfish ends he, the warrior, has counselled war, that in war the value of his services might be enhanced. He has excited this monstrous insurrection that his presence might be deemed necessary in order to quell it. And I fall a victim to his mean hatred, his contemptible envy. Yes, I know it, dying and mortally wounded I may utter it; long has the proud man envied me, long has he meditated and planned my ruin.

Even then, when still young, we played at dice together, and the heaps of gold, one after the other, passed rapidly from his side to mine; he would look on with affected composure, while inwardly consumed with rage, more at my success than at his own loss. Well do I remember the fiery glance, the treacherous pallor that overspread his features when, at a public festival, we shot for a wager before assembled thousands. He challenged me, and both nations stood by; Spaniards and Netherlanders wagered on either side; I was the victor; his ball missed, mine hit the mark, and the air was rent by acclamations from my friends. His shot now hits me. Tell him that I know this, that I know him, that the world despises every trophy that a paltry spirit erects for itself by base and surreptitious arts. And thou !

If it be possible for a son to swerve from the manners of his father, practise shame betimes, while thou art compelled to feel shame for him whom thou wouldst fain revere with thy whole heart.

Ferdinand. I listen without interrupting thee! Thy reproaches fall like blows upon a helmet. I feel the shock, but I am armed. They strike, they wound me not; I am sensible only to the anguish that lacerates my heart. Alas! Alas! Have I lived to

witness such a scene? Am I sent hither to behold a spectacle like this?

Egmont. Dost thou break out into lamentations? What moves, what agitates thee thus? Is it a late remorse at having lent thyself to this infamous conspiracy? Thou art so young, thy exterior is so prepossessing? Thy demeanour towards me was so friendly, so unreserved! So long as I beheld thee, I was reconciled with thy father; and crafty, ay, more crafty than he, thou hast lured me into the toils. Thou art the wretch! The monster! Who so confides in him, does so at his own peril; but who could apprehend danger in trusting thee? Go! Go! rob me not of the few moments that are left me! Go, that I may collect my thoughts, the world forget, and first of all thyself!

Ferdinand. What can I say? I stand and gaze on thee, yet see thee not; I am scarcely conscious of my own existence. Shall I seek to excuse myself? Shall I assure thee that it was not till the last moment that I was made aware of my father's intentions? That I acted as a constrained, a passive instrument of his will? What signifies now the opinion thou mayst entertain of me? Thou art lost; and I, miserable wretch, stand here only to assure thee of it, only to lament thy doom.

Egmont. What strange voice, what unexpected consolation comes thus to cheer my passage to the grave? Thou, the son of my first, of almost my only enemy, thou dost pity me, thou art not associated with my murderers? Speak! In what light must I regard thee?

Ferdinand. Cruel father! Yes, I recognize thy nature in this command. Thou didst know my heart, my disposition, which thou hast so often censured as the inheritance of a tender-hearted Mother. To mould me into thine own likeness thou hast sent me hither. Thou dost compel me to behold this man on the verge of the yawning grave, in the grasp of an arbitrary doom, that I may experience the profoundest anguish; that thus, rendered callous to every fate, I may henceforth meet every event with a heart unmoved.

Egmont. I am amazed! Be calm! Act, speak like a man.

Ferdinand. Oh, that I were a woman! That they might say—what moves, what agitates thee? Tell me of a greater, a more monstrous crime, make me the spectator of a more direful deed; I will thank thee, I will say: this was nothing.

Egmont. Thou dost forget thyself. Consider where thou art!

Ferdinand. Let this passion rage, let me give vent to my anguish! I will not seem composed when my whole inner being is convulsed. Thee must I behold here? Thee? It is horrible! Thou understandest me not! How shouldst thou understand me? Egmont! Egmont!

(Falling on his neck.)

Egmont. Explain this mystery.

Ferdinand. It is no mystery.

Egmont. How can the fate of a mere stranger thus deeply move thee?

Ferdinand. Not a stranger! Thou art no stranger to me. Thy name it was that, even from my boyhood, shone before me like a star in heaven! How often have I made inquiries concerning thee, and listened to the story of thy deeds! The youth is the hope of the boy, the man of the youth. Thus didst thou walk before me, ever before me; I saw thee without envy, and followed after, step by step; at length I hoped to see thee—I saw thee, and my heart flew to thy embrace. I had destined thee for myself, and when I beheld thee, I made choice of thee anew. I hoped now to know thee, to live with thee, to be thy friend,—thy—‘tis over now and I see thee here!

Egmont. My friend, if it can be any comfort to thee, be assured that the very moment we met my heart was drawn towards thee. Now listen! Let us exchange a few quiet words. Tell me: is it the stern, the settled purpose of thy father to take my life?

Ferdinand. It is.

Egmont. This sentence is not a mere empty scarecrow, designed to terrify me, to punish me through fear and intimidation, to humiliate me, that he may then raise me again by the royal favour?

Ferdinand. Alas, no! At first I flattered myself with this delusive hope; and even then my heart was filled with grief and anguish to behold thee thus. Thy doom is real! Is certain! No, I cannot command myself. Who will counsel, who will aid me, to meet the inevitable?

Egmont. Hearken then to me! If thy heart is impelled so powerfully in my

favour, if thou dost abhor the tyranny that holds me fettered, then deliver me! The moments are precious. Thou art the son of the all-powerful, and thou hast power thyself. Let us fly! I know the roads; the means of effecting our escape cannot be unknown to thee. These walls, a few short miles, alone separate me from my friends. Loose these fetters, conduct me to them; be ours. The king, on some future day, will doubtless thank my deliverer. Now he is taken by surprise, or perchance he is ignorant of the whole proceeding. Thy father ventures on this daring step, and majesty, though horror-struck at the deed, must needs sanction the irrevocable. Thou dost deliberate? Oh, contrive for me the way to freedom! Speak; nourish hope in a living soul.

Ferdinand. Cease! Oh, cease! Every word deepens my despair. There is here no outlet, no counsel, no escape.—'Tis this thought that tortures me, that seizes my heart, and rends it as with talons. I have myself spread the net; I know its firm, inextricable knots; I know that every avenue is barred alike to courage and to stratagem. I feel that I too, like thyself, like all the rest, am fettered. Think'st thou that I should give way to lamentation if any means of safety remained untried? I have thrown myself at his feet, remonstrated, implored. He has sent me hither, in order to blast in this fatal moment, every remnant of joy and happiness that yet survived within my heart.

Egmont. And is there no deliverance?

Ferdinand. None!

Egmont (stamping his foot). No deliverance!-Sweet life! Sweet, pleasant habitude of existence and of activity! from thee must I part! So calmly part! Not in the tumult of battle, amid the din of arms, the excitement of the fray, dost thou send me a hasty farewell; thine is no hurried leave; thou dost not abridge the moment of separation. Once more let me clasp thy hand, gaze once more into thine eyes, feel with keen emotion, thy beauty and thy worth, then resolutely tear myself away, and say;—depart!

Ferdinand. Must I stand by, and look passively on; unable to save thee, or to give thee aid! What voice avails for lamentation! What heart but must break under the pressure of such anguish?

Egmont. Be calm!

Ferdinand. Thou canst be calm, thou canst renounce, led on by necessity, thou

canst advance to the direful struggle, with the courage of a hero. What can I do? What ought I to do? Thou dost conquer thyself and us; thou art the victor; I survive both myself and thee. I have lost my light at the banquet, my banner on the field. The future lies before me, dark, desolate, perplexed.

Egmont. Young friend, whom by a strange fatality, at the same moment, I both win and lose, who dost feel for me, who dost suffer for me the agonies of death, —look on me; —thou wilt not lose me. If my life was a mirror in which thou didst love to contemplate thyself, so be also my death. Men are not together only when in each other's presence;—the distant, the departed, also live for us. I shall live for thee, and for myself I have lived long enough. I have enjoyed each day; each day, I have performed, with prompt activity, the duties enjoined by my conscience. Now my life ends, as it might have ended, long, long, ago, on the sands of Gravelines. I shall cease to live; but I have lived. My friend, follow in my steps, lead a cheerful and a joyous life, and dread not the approach of death.

Ferdinand. Thou shouldst have saved thyself for us, thou couldst have saved thyself. Thou art the cause of thine own destruction. Often have I listened when able men discoursed concerning thee; foes and friends, they would dispute long as to thy worth; but on one point they were agreed, none ventured to deny, every one confessed, that thou wert treading a dangerous path. How often have I longed to warn thee! Hadst thou then no friends?

Egmont. I was warned.

Ferdinand. And when I found all these allegations, point for point, in the indictment, together with thy answers, containing much that might serve to palliate thy conduct, but no evidence weighty enough fully to exculpate thee—

Egmont. No more of this. Man imagines that he directs his life, that he governs his actions, when in fact his existence is irresistibly controlled by his destiny. Let us not dwell upon this subject; these reflections I can dismiss with ease—not so my apprehensions for these provinces; yet they too will be cared for. Could my blood flow for many, bring peace to my people, how freely should it flow! Alas! This may not be. Yet it ill becomes a man idly to speculate, when the power to act is no longer his. If thou canst restrain or guide the fatal power of thy father; do so. Alas, who can? —Farewell!

Ferdinand. I cannot leave thee.

Egmont. Let me urgently recommend my followers to thy care! I have worthy men in my service; let them not be dispersed, let them not become destitute! How fares it with Richard, my secretary?

Ferdinand. He is gone before thee. They have beheaded him, as thy accomplice in high treason.

Egmont. Poor soul!—Yet one word, and then farewell, I can no more. However powerfully the spirit may be stirred, nature at length irresistibly asserts her rights; and like a child, who, enveloped in a serpent's folds, enjoys refreshing slumber, so the weary one lays himself down to rest before the gates of death, and sleeps soundly, as though a toilsome journey yet lay before him.—One word more,—I know a maiden; thou wilt not despise her because she was mine. Since I can recommend her to thy care, I shall die in peace. Thy soul is noble; in such a man, a woman is sure to find a protector. Lives my old Adolphus? Is he free?

Ferdinand. The active old man, who always attended thee on horseback?

Egmont. The same.

Ferdinand. He lives, he is free.

Egmont. He knows her dwelling; let him guide thy steps thither, and reward him to his dying day, for having shown thee the way to this jewel.- -Farewell!

Ferdinand. I cannot leave thee.

Egmont (urging him towards the door). Farewell!

Ferdinand. Oh, let me linger yet a moment!

Egmont. No leave-taking, my friend.

(He accompanies Ferdinand to the door, and then tears himself away; Ferdinand, overwhelmed with grief, hastily retires.)

Egmont (alone)

Egmont. Cruel man! Thou didst not think to render me this service through thy son. He has been the means of relieving my mind from the pressure of care and

sorrow, from fear and every anxious feeling. Gently, yet urgently, nature claims her final tribute. ‘Tis past!—‘Tis resolved! And the reflections which, in the suspense of last night, kept me wakeful on my couch, now with resistless certainty lull my senses to repose.

(He seats himself upon the couch; music)

Sweet sleep! Like the purest happiness, thou comest most willingly, uninvited, unsought. Thou dost loosen the knots of earnest thoughts, dost mingle all images of joy and of sorrow, unimpeded the circle of inner harmony flows on, and wrapped in fond delusion, we sink into oblivion, and cease to be.

(He sleeps; music accompanies his slumber. Behind his couch the wall appears to open and discovers a brilliant apparition. Freedom, in a celestial garb, surrounded by a glory, reposes on a cloud. Her features are those of Clara and she inclines towards the sleeping hero. Her countenance betokens compassion, she seems to lament his fate. Quickly she recovers herself and with an encouraging gesture exhibits the symbols of freedom, the bundle of arrows, with the staff and cap. She encourages him to be of good cheer, and while she signifies to him that his death will secure the freedom of the provinces, she hails him as a conqueror, and extends to him a laurel crown. As the wreath approaches his head, Egmont moves like one asleep, and reclines with his face towards her. She holds the wreath suspended over his head,—martial music is heard in the distance, at the first sound the vision disappears. The music grows louder and louder. Egmont awakes. The prison is dimly illuminated by the dawn.—His first impulse is to lift his hand to his head, he stands up, and gazes round, his hand still upraised.)

The crown is vanished! Beautiful vision, the light of day has frighted thee! Yes, their revealed themselves to my sight uniting in one radiant form the two sweetest joys of my heart. Divine Liberty borrowed the mien of my beloved one; the lovely maiden arrayed herself in the celestial garb of my friend. In a solemn moment they appeared united, with aspect more earnest than tender. With bloodstained feet the vision approached, the waving folds of her robe also were tinged with blood. It was my blood, and the blood of many brave hearts. No! It shall not be shed in vain! Forward! Brave people! The goddess of liberty leads you on! And as the sea breaks through and destroys the barriers that would oppose its fury, so do ye overwhelm the bulwark of tyranny, and with your impetuous flood sweep it away from the land which it usurps. (Drums.)

Hark! Hark! How often has this sound summoned my joyous steps to the field of battle and of victory! How bravely did I tread, with my gallant comrades, the dangerous path of fame! And now, from this dungeon I shall go forth, to meet a glorious death; I die for freedom, for whose cause I have lived and fought, and for whom I now offer myself up at sorrowing sacrifice.

(The background is occupied by Spanish soldiers with halberts.)

Yes, lead them on! Close your ranks, ye terrify me not. I am accustomed to stand amid the serried ranks of war, and environed by the threatening forms of death, to feel, with double zest, the energy of life. (Drums.)

The foe closes round on every side! Swords are flashing; courage, friends! Behind are your parents, your wives, your children! (Pointing to the guard.)

And these are impelled by the word of their leader, not by their own free will. Protect your homes! And to save those who are most dear to you, be ready to follow my example, and to fall with joy.

(Drums. As he advances through the guards towards the door in the background, the curtain falls. The music joins in, and the scene closes with a symphony of victory.

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